

## PANDEMICS, IMMUNIZATION AND TOURISM RECOVERY

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**Abstract:** *The corona (COVID-19), pandemic has had a negative impact on the global travel and tourism industry. Many companies in the industry, such as airlines, hospitals, and restaurants, have experienced unparalleled challenges and uncertainty as a result of the pandemic. Product and service readiness is crucial for tourism and hospitality companies in order to reduce visitors' safety and risk perceptions associated with COVID-19. Tourists must be assured that they can travel safely and technology may help to resolve this. The vaccine produces acquired herd immunity, so that when the individual's body comes into contact with the actual disease-causing agent, it is equipped to mount a response. The vaccination, when paired with other risk-mitigation methods such as COVID-19 surveillance, opens a vital window of opportunity for mitigating the COVID-19 pandemic and promoting the safe resumption of international travel. Scientists caution that vaccine hesitancy could hinder pandemic recovery. The radical shift that the tourism industry has experienced may profoundly question people's trust in tourism as an outlet for enhancing well-being in the coming post-pandemic period. With borders closed, several countries shifted their attention to domestic tourists and supported the preservation of their economic stability. Tourism recovery is to be stimulated through investments that promote economic growth, job creation, and sustainability. Technical advancements could provide resources for tourism to increase inclusiveness, local citizen empowerment, and effective resource management.*

**Keywords:** *pandemic, vaccination, tourism, recovery, immunization, COVID-19*

### INTRODUCTION

The coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic has been one of the most notable events of the twenty-first century. Even in its early stages the effect on tourism is enormous. According to latest figures, 75 million tourism workers are at risk, and the industry will lose more than 2.1 trillion US dollars in sales (WTTC 2021). Borders are locked, cruise ships are docked, whole air fleets are grounded, and hotels, restaurants, and tourist attractions are closed (Zenker and Kock 2020).

According to World Tourism Organization [UNWTO] (2020) figures, international tourist arrivals decreased by a double-digit of 22 percent in the first quartile of 2020, with arrivals falling by 57 percent in March 2020 as a result of travel bans and border closures placed by countries worldwide. In other words, the first quartile of 2020 saw a loss of 67 million overseas visitors and \$80 billion in tourism receipts.

Additionally, the UNWTO (2020) made some main predictions about travel habits in 2020, implying that travel restrictions and national boundaries will be eventually lifted in July, September, or December. According to UNWTO (2020), (1) domestic travel demand is projected to rebound faster than international travel demand, (2) international travel demand can recover by the fourth quartile of 2020 and mainly in 2021, (3) international tourist arrivals can fall by 58 percent to 78 percent, and (4) international tourist arrivals may fall by one billion, and (5) international tourism receipts may drop by \$1 trillion.

### **CORONAVIRUS – A NATURAL CRISIS OR A MANMADE DISASTER?**

Rossolatos (2020) explains that lethal viruses have left a long trail and a much longer death count in human history. The Bubonic plague (also known as the Black Death) wiped out 200 million lives between AD 1346 and 1353, while the influenza pandemic that spread at the turn of the last century killed 50 million.

In modern day world, viruses such as Ebola and SARS, though less lethal in absolute numbers than their counterparts, have managed to wipe out a large portion of those affected. The new Corona virus, which was named COVID-19 by the World Health Organization (WHO), which emerged at the end of 2019 in the Chinese area of Wuhan, achieved epidemic status within a month before being upgraded to pandemic status within two months. The virus's effect on public opinion became more apparent as the death rate grew after its expansion, resulting in mass shopping and vacant store shelves for some goods.

From the standpoint of cultural branding this opinion echoed in profound anxieties that resulted in response to the virus. These concerns appear to propagate in a number of ways, none of which are specifically linked to the virus itself, ranging from discontent with political processes to toilet-paper shortages. But are we facing a crisis or a disaster?

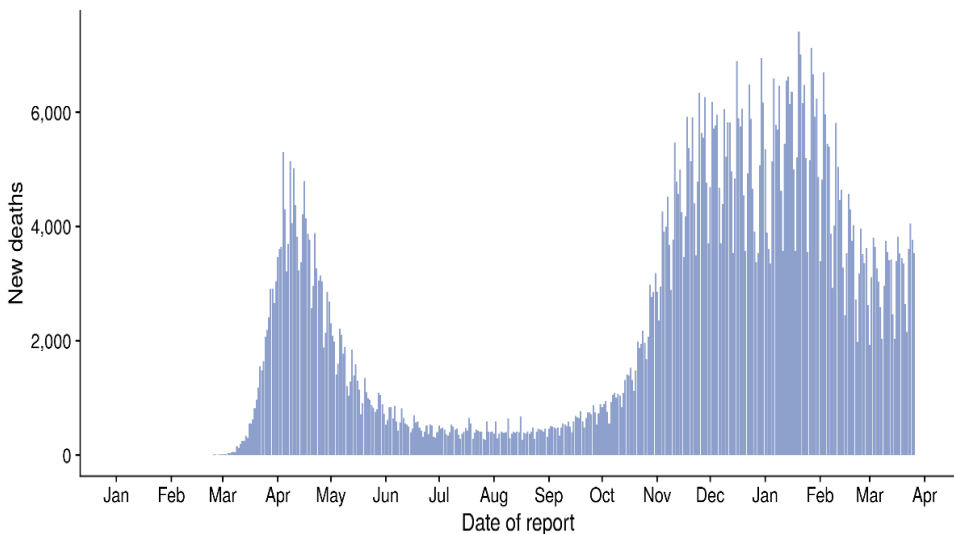
Zenker and Kock (2020) outline crises and disasters as commonly well-studied phenomena. A crisis is as a physical disturbance that impacts

a system as a whole and undermines its fundamental norms and existential core. A disaster is a situation under which an establishment is challenged by a sudden unexpected devastating alteration that can't be controlled. The main difference is “whether the cause is due to some internal organizational failure to act (a crisis) or an external event over which the organization has no control (a disaster)” (ibid).

They further distinguish between natural disasters (e.g., earthquakes, flooding or epidemics) and socio-political/human-made disasters (e.g., wars, terrorist attacks, political or economic crises). The conceptualization of these events is, however, fluent and varies in the literature (as human-made disasters are often rather crises and some natural disasters are man-made) (ibid.). So, it can be argued that the coronavirus pandemic is both a natural and a socio-political or manmade disaster.

The unexpected outbreak of COVID-19 has been an unforeseen shock to sustainable tourism, which is expected to explore promising ways to increase visitor health and maintain long-term vitality, with the goal of addressing the needs of existing visitors and host regions while preserving and improving opportunities for the future.

**Figure1:** New confirmed deaths in European Region, by date of report - n= 952.112 by 28.3.2021 (WHO 2021)

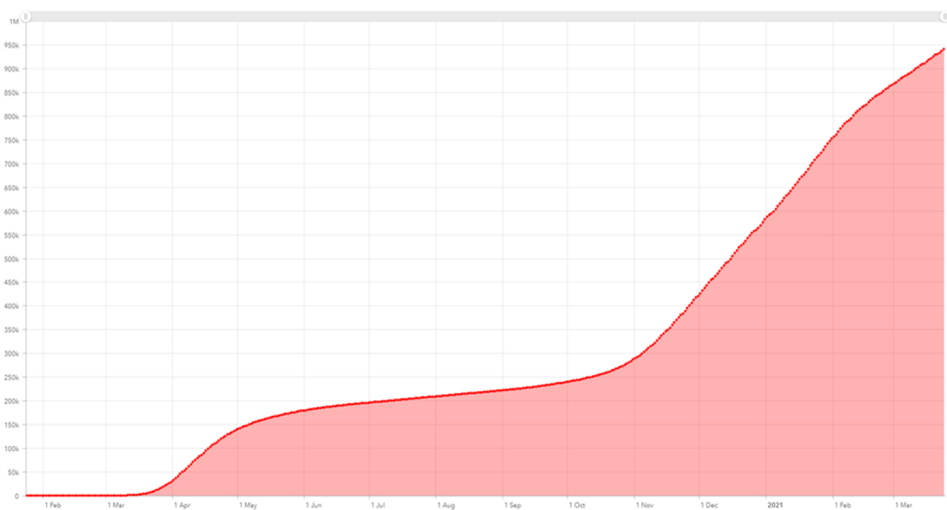


Yang and Wong (2020) state that a drastic global health emergency or other comparable catastrophe may threaten the travel industry's hopes, morality, and fairness, the lack of which will bring into question the

fundamental importance that tourism has always given. Panic, stress, and prejudice are fuelled by possible risks to public health and a distrust of scarce funding, both of which bring into question the willingness of service agencies and local residents to deliver the best travel opportunities for travellers, shaking the cornerstone of travel-induced well-being.

Anxiety, mistrust, and bigotry are widespread in the wake of the pandemic's hysteria. They are putting shame on visitors from afflicted areas and triggering discriminatory behaviour toward them. This invariably leads to psychological distress, which culminates in a lack of well-being during the journey. (ibid.)

**Figure 2:** Cumulative deaths in Europe – year 2020-2021  
(WHO Europe 2021)



## **TECHNOLOGICAL RESPONSES TO COVID-19 PROBLEMS IN TOURISM**

Cheer et al. (2021) explain that prior to COVID-19, there was some debate about whether tourism had become too massive for the world. There have been calls to minimize tourism, make it more economically friendly, and assist regions where there is excessive tourism in becoming stronger to crises.

With almost no international travel scheduled in 2020, the world is now faced with the opposite challenge. Destinations in developed countries, where tourism is a substantial source of income, rely heavily on foreign

tourism. These have taken the brunt of the damage. According to the World Bank, tourism accounts for approximately 15% of Thailand's GDP, which is why the country recently began encouraging select international visitors to return for extended stays (ibid.).

A general summary of “COVID-19 ready” short-term technology needs by the travel industry, suggested by Mizrachi et al. (2021: 493), covers hygiene, traffic control, and immediate communications. It is suggested that tourism companies ensure that the sanitation and cleanliness of their location meet the highest expectations (with the need for technical solutions that can improve hygiene quality; for example, museum audio guide physical equipment can be replaced by software, allowing visitors to experience the same material on their smartphones without health issues).

Following that, it is mentioned that when it comes to COVID-19, people congestion presents a significant obstacle, such as check-in processes or visitors using public restrooms inside the venues (the need for digital tools to track in-venue flow, as well as booking tools to give users more control over facility use). Finally, the significance of instant contact is stressed. Continuous planning is needed for crisis management. Customers in the hospitality industry, from amusement park visitors to hotel guests, will be more comfortable if they are kept up to date on venue rules, guest safety measures, and so on. In a crowded, advertising-driven environment, basic Facebook updates might not be enough (ibid.).

## **IMMUNIZATION AND TOURISM SAFETY**

Vaccines for travel are classified into three types: regular, obligatory, and recommended. Regular injections are prescribed for all at particular times and are normally included with most national immunization plans. Hepatitis A and B vaccines, rotavirus, DTaP, tetanus, pneumococcal, HPV, flu, polio, and meningococcal vaccines are examples of regular vaccines. Most people in certain countries got all of their regular vaccines as infants, providing herd immunity to populations of those countries against diseases protected by routine vaccines.

International visitors, on the other hand, would be up to speed on regular vaccinations while under-vaccination rates remain high in some countries. Required immunizations are vaccinations that travellers need to get before visiting specific destinations in accordance with international health legislation. Recommended vaccines, unlike required vaccines, are not required. They are often recommended to foreign travellers based on

disease risk endemicity, which means that the disease is prevalent in the destination (Adongo et al. 2021).

Depending on the jurisdiction, anti-discrimination laws can include health status as a covered class in general, as well as others for whom infection presents a disproportionate danger, such as the elderly, pregnant women, persons with disabilities, or those with chronic conditions. This imbalance is not a product that can be legislated away: enacting regulations that ban discrimination based on immune status is incompatible with a mechanism that is deliberately structured to prioritize socioeconomic inclusion based on those status (Phelan 2020: 1597).

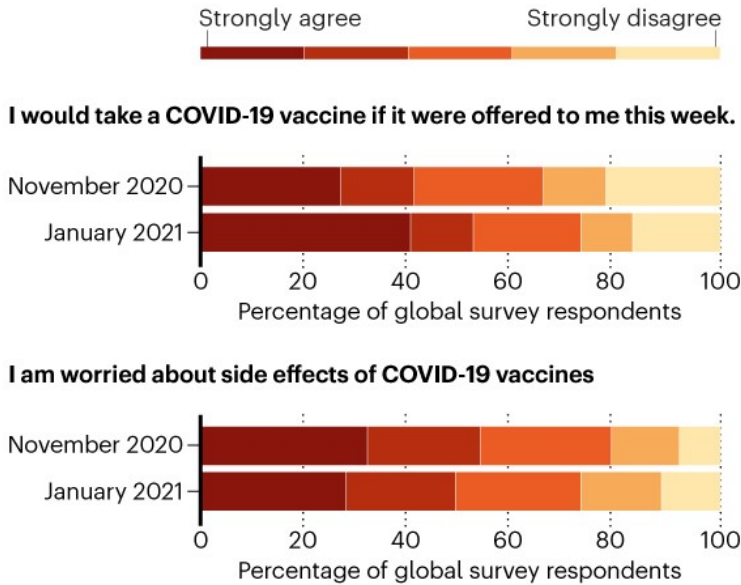
According to behavioural psychologists, people's views of things, and their fears, are multifaceted (Adongo et al. 2021). Anti-vaccination sentiments can manifest in a variety of ways, including mistrust of vaccinations and their effects, worries about unanticipated unintended outcomes, concerns about agricultural profiteering, and a desire for natural immunity. It implies that for a proper understanding, a conceptually oriented approach to researching vaccination issues is necessary (especially one that can inform behavioural intervention). In reality, there is almost no psychometric appraisal scale that can be used to measure vaccine attitudes and views, including fears, among international travellers (ibid.).

Vaccines may contain preservatives or antibiotics to prolong their shelf life, as well as adjuvants to stimulate an immune response. Using the WHO definition of a vaccine as a reference, we describe travel vaccination as an effort to introduce a traveller's body to a vaccine – a diminished or killed version of the pathogen that causes disease – such as viruses or bacteria – or its toxins or one of its surface proteins. Vaccines establish herd immunity, which reaches beyond the human level. Herd immunity is particularly important for protecting vulnerable individuals, such as children and immune-compromised people who cannot be vaccinated due to age or medical reasons. As such, one source of concern regarding herd immunity is the 'free rider' controversy, under which certain individuals deliberately opt not to vaccinate in order to profit from others. This is indeed a broader concept that refers to the production of sufficient immunity to a disease as a result of vaccination (ibid.).

Mega (2021) proposes that a survey conducted in multiple countries shows promising patterns, but researchers caution that vaccine hesitancy could stymie pandemic recovery. The study is part of the COVID-19 activity tracker, which Imperial is conducting in partnership with the UK market analysis firm YouGov. It ran from November 2020 to January 2021, polling nearly 13,500 people per time across Europe, Asia, and Australia.

In November, before countries started to accept COVID-19 vaccines, only about 40% of respondents said they would get a COVID-19 vaccine if given one during the week they took the poll, and more than half were concerned about possible side effects. But the attitudes started changing once national roll-outs began. In January, more than half of those polled said they would get a vaccine if it was available during the survey week. In comparison, the percentage of people who are worried about the side effects of vaccination has fallen to 47%. The United Kingdom had the largest proportion of citizens agreeing to undergo a vaccine (78%), and for 11 of the 15 nations, this proportion rose, often significantly. In Spain, for example, the proportion of respondents ready to be immunized had risen from 28% in November 2020 to 52% by mid-January (ibid.).

**Figure 3:** Vaccine Confidence – a global survey suggests that a growing share of people are willing to be vaccinated against COVID-19 (Mega 2021)



The Global Tourism Crisis Committee met in January 2021. The meeting was organized by the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) that prepared the cross-sector body, which met in Madrid during the 113th session of the UNWTO Executive Council to advance strong efforts to revitalize tourism. The meeting concentrated on incorporating vaccination into a unified approach to healthy travel and initiating a concerted campaign to improve sector morale (UNWTO 2021).

The Committee acknowledged that countries across the world are already carrying out vaccinations against the COVID-19 virus, which opens

a key window in the battle against the pandemic and promotes the healthy resumption of international travel. Members emphasized the importance of increasing coordination of vaccine certificates within the context of the International Health Regulations in order to ensure the enforcement of universal, harmonized digital travel principles, guidelines, and records. This will be aligned with the World Health Organization's (WHO) work, which has reported on possible applications of digital technology to allow healthy international travel and promote arrivals and departures.

The Committee's own Technical Group, headed by Greece, and a committed inter-agency group drawing on various aspects of the United Nations mechanism and international organizations are working to ensure that policies, including by states, are adopted to promote their implementation at any level of tourism. UNWTO Secretary-General Pololikashvili emphasized that the rollout of vaccines was a step in the right direction, but the restart of tourism could not wait, because vaccines were to be part of a wider, coordinated approach that included certificates and passes for safe cross-border travel. In the longer-term confidence in tourism should be restored with the help of the United for Travel campaign which would provide a clear and strong message that safe tourism was possible (ibid.).

## **RECOVERY OF THE TOURIST SECTOR IN AIR TRAVEL**

Cheer et al. (2021) suggest COVID-19 has prompted a great deal of reflection on our interaction with the world. Activists for more sustainable tourism expect that in the coming years, foreign travel will be rethought with more innovation and a renewed commitment to addressing climate change and crisis management. They propose that “getting passengers back in the air again would be influenced by three main issues”: strong aviation rules, the reconstruction of airlines and their routes, and the restoration of travellers' trust. As a consequence, health expectations could soon begin to reflect those in the past. In the 1970s, getting the requisite vaccinations and health clearances was needed for travel to and from many countries. Coronavirus vaccination would almost definitely become standard on international flights as well. This could be easily adopted by all nations, and it could also be expanded more broadly, such as in hotels (ibid.)

The *CommonPass*, a recent digital health passport that seems to be a reliable model for validating people's COVID-free status reliably around the world, may be one alternative. Other protection interventions, such as mandatory in-flight gloves, pre-departure and arrival monitoring, mandatory quarantining, and social distancing, will remain critical. If



vaccination rates in destinations are poor, these precautions will become even more important. By the use of biometric technologies, touchless travel can now become the norm at most airports. Passengers can also anticipate temperature screening and limited access to in-flight facilities as the current standard.

Long quarantine times are one of the most significant barriers to resuming international travel — few people can afford 14 days in a quarantine hotel on top of their vacation. Potential options are being investigated. Prior to the release of the current COVID version, British Airways and American Airlines piloted a voluntary trial scheme for certain passengers in order to circumvent the required 14-day quarantine time in the UK. In addition, the British government launched the latest “test and release” scheme in mid-December 2020, which will reduce the quarantine time for foreign arrivals to five days (*ibid.*).

Furthermore, the International Air Travel Association estimates that the aviation industry will not recover to pre-pandemic values until at least 2024. This means that any tourism revival would necessitate the restoration of transportation infrastructure and networks, especially for aviation and cruising. Most aircraft are still parked in the deserts of the United States and Australia. There are many tasks to be fulfilled: flights must be restored and properly serviced, crews must be rehired or retrained. Re-establishing air routes and maintaining their long-term stability would be a very difficult task for airlines.

Cheer et al. (2021) explain that when airlines gradually rebuild their networks, passengers will have to accept less frequent connections, longer journeys, and lengthy layovers. Domestic flights in the United States have dropped, and while international flight schedules have been drastically reduced, low demand has kept some prices low. Smaller, more flexible carriers should do well. They expect lighter, more powerful aircraft to become more popular as well. Long-haul flight demand will stay poor for some time. Meanwhile, airports will need temporary or permanent reorganizations to accommodate new public health screening and monitoring arrangements, potentially adding to travellers’ dissatisfaction. Cruise ships and port terminals, as well as hotels and other hospitality outlets, will meet similar criteria.

Also, the lingering fear of coronavirus infections would be the most difficult barrier to conquer for leisure travellers. It remains to be seen, though, whether travellers will have a high tolerance for danger or how easily they will respond to new safety protocols. The solution to restoring traveller confidence would be to standardize protection and sanitation initiatives across the global travel supply chain. When businesses also

followed health and hygiene guidelines, a “Safe Travels” stamp will be issued (ibid.).

## **DEVELOPMENTS THAT ARE EXPECTED IN THE NEAR FUTURE**

The most recent UNWTO Panel of Experts (UNWTO 2021) poll reveals a mixed picture for 2021. Almost half of respondents (45%) predicted improved outcomes for 2021 compared to last year, while 25% predicted a similar outlook and 30% predicted a deterioration of performances.

The chances for a revival in 2021 appear to have deteriorated. In October 2020, 50% of respondents predicted a comeback in 2022, compared to 21% in October 2020. The remaining half of respondents see a possible revival in 2021, though at a lower level than in the October 2020 poll (79% expected a recovery in 2021).

Experts predict an increase in demand for open-air and nature-based tourist programs, with domestic tourism and ‘slow travel’ experiences gaining popularity. Looking ahead, most analysts do not foresee a return to pre-pandemic peaks before 2023. In reality, 43% of respondents anticipate a return to 2019 levels in 2024 or later, while 41 % anticipate a return to 2019 levels in 2024 or later. According to UNWTO's extended scenarios for 2021-2024, foreign tourism could take between two and a half and four years to rebound to 2019 levels. During the coming year, the phased introduction of a COVID-19 vaccine is expected to help regain consumer trust, lead to the relaxation of travel bans, and gradually normalize travel (ibid.).

With borders closed, several countries shifted their attention to domestic tourists. This has supported the preservation of economic stability in countries such as China and Japan. Slovenia had the largest increase in the number of nights generated by domestic tourists in the EU, at 33%. Malta and Cyprus were the only two countries that saw a spike in domestic nights last year (both up 15%). Drops in all EU countries were registered, with the sharpest – those of more than 70% – being the most serious – reported by Cyprus, Greece and Malta. Although the Netherlands and Denmark recorded declines of less than 35% in tourist nights, Slovenia reported a decline of 42%. Meanwhile, the number of nights generated by international tourists has decreased by an average of 68 percent in the EU, whereas the number of nights generated by domestic tourists has decreased by 38 percent (Eurostat 2021).

Although Slovenia, Malta, and Cyprus created more domestic tourist nights in 2020, Spain, Greece, and Romania recorded the steepest drops of more than 40%. Foreign tourist nights were down in all EU member nations, with Cyprus and Romania losing the most (more than 80%), and Slovenia losing the most (71%) (ibid.).

Along with the work of the Technical Group, the Committee sought funding for the OECD's own plan to establish a harmonized system of border controls. Members of the Crisis Committee have called for decisive measures to promote the standardization, digitization, and interoperability of testing standards and certification programs and decided that they should be based on common facts and risk-assessment metrics for the origin and destination countries or territories. The application of the CART Take-Off Guidance (Council Aviation Recovery Taskforce), established by ICAO, was recognized as an important method for advancing research procedure harmonization and hastening the development of Public Health Corridors. Tourism recovery should be stimulated through investments in tourism that promote economic growth, job creation, and sustainability to public and private capital sources. Technical advancements could provide resources for tourism to increase inclusiveness, local citizen empowerment, and effective resource management (UNWTO 2021).

## CONCLUSION

Tourism has long been recognized as a factor that promotes economic growth as it provides infrastructure, employment, and profits that help a destination's economy expand. The tourism industry, which covers the catering services, hotels, and air transportation industries, really has measurable obligations outside their economic goals. This is due to the intimate and direct relationship with the people and atmosphere of the destination, who are the factors of the trade. Because of its role, tourism has been identified as a key factor that generates not only economic benefits but also social power.

According to Chua (2021) tourism would play a major role in nurturing the well-being of visitors, hosts, and cultures, encouraging environmental and cultural protections, and promoting global peace and consciousness. People should bear in mind that the planet has never experienced such far-reaching consequences on the global economy until the emergence of COVID-19, which has caused far more unprecedented social and economic fallout than past pandemics such as SARS and H1N1. Rational recovery following COVID-19 will also strengthen tourism's long-

term capacity to deal with well-being crises, especially in a world with the new normal and rebuilt post-COVID global order.

The vaccine, in conjunction with other risk-mitigation tools such as COVID-19 monitoring, opens a crucial window of opportunity to combat the COVID-19 pandemic and facilitate the secure resumption of international travel. It is important to accelerate the alignment of international cross-border travel standards and protocols in order to ensure a safe and smooth restart of tourism.

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