

Love (*for travel*) in the time of Corona

By Nadhirah Rosli | August 5, 2021, 4.00pm

It is said that absence makes the heart grow fonder. When it comes to travel, there are no truer words spoken. Traveling has become such an innate part for many first-world citizens in this time and space that further postponement of reopening may bring about more detriment than good to the nation.

The question here is not so much about when travel will begin as it is about *how travelers can begin* traveling during the post-pandemic stage.

There are several causes of concern that a traveler will have and this may vary according to one's societal and demographic background.

The Mark of a New Tourism Era

Tourism is one of the most evolved industries since its inception. While being punished by the crisis, it cannot remain dormant until the storm passes.

The pandemic has made it clear that the future of tourism and tourism in general will change. These changes are brought about by the new reality that is emerging, as well as the sediment that will settle when this nightmare comes to an end.

Based on an analysis of emerging trends in the travel industry, here are some case-in-point developments that help us understand travelers' preferences and desires.

High priority in health and hygiene excellence: Excellence in health and hygiene service in countries such as Singapore will be highly reflected. The measures taken and communicated by a government will reflect the concern of providers of various tourist services for their clients and employees.

Using communication as an ally for success: Marketing strategies and the development of new products and services that are tailored to changing tastes and needs will continue to be the deciding factors between success and failure. The caveat, however, remains in the efficiency of communication in all of its aspects suited to each demand niche.

Travel agencies are making a comeback: Travel agencies will benefit as a result of their role as generators of clients' tranquility. This is particularly the case for online travel agencies, as digitalization continues to dominate the industry.

In the era of mask-wearing travelers and the threat of lockdown, insurance, notably that involving cancellations and doctors with improved coverage, has emerged as a key player.

Remote working as a formula for expanding the offer: This is one of those trends that has grown exponentially, as evidenced by some destinations that are already looking for their market niche. Collaboration between the various entities that comprise the destination and the various types of accommodation will be critical when it comes to attracting a demand that seeks new destinations and is a key factor in seasonal adjustment.

Integrating technology to get to know the client: Using technology for products and services is a key ingredient in attracting travellers. When the right system is in place, it is easier to identify the right demographic of guests based on their preferences and concerns when traveling than ever before. This allows for more decisive decision-making when providing services to these visitors.

Other trends stand out, such as artificial intelligence for first-level communication assistance. Virtual reality can be used for a variety of purposes, including destination marketing, data management, and alternative payment systems. All of these advancements will be critical in the development of new tourist destinations as well as the reinvention of mature destinations.

All-inclusive tourism: The importance of accessibility will continue to grow, thanks in part to an aging population. It will provide greater comfort not only to people with special needs, but also to the general population.

Regenerative and conscious tourism: Prior to the pandemic, sustainable tourism was already a growing trend. The significance has grown to the point where it is now a requirement for various destinations and operators. The emphasis is no longer solely on growth, but on doing so wisely, utilizing all resources without jeopardizing them.

With education, it brings about awareness for regenerative tourism. Travelers who choose this type of tourism no longer want to leave a place in the same condition in which they found it. They now want to improve it after their stay by participating in local activities, treating the destination as if it were their home, and investing their money to help local economic development. In this new era of tourism, rural tourism and variants such as Astrotourism will be crucial.

Holistic approach to Seasonal Destinations: Cyclical adjustment has always been a fundamental factor in some tourist destinations with a clearly defined season, essentially those that have based their offerings on sunny beaches and have not varied their services in existing undervalued tourist resources to extend tourism seasons. To maximize potential revenue, alternatives should be developed to place emphasis on the destination even during low periods.

Looking at the trends, it is clear that the love of travel has evolved significantly over the pandemic. What used to be important to travelers may no longer be so, vis-à-vis funds being the most important factor in travel decisions. Since travel has been stagnant for nearly two years, people are more willing to splurge for an overall quality experience rather than being too tight with their purse strings.

The emphasis on health and security, environmental consciousness, comfort, convenience, and one-of-a-kind experiences has trumped price sensitivity. Although budgeting is still the foundation for planning any trip (not to mention that the majority are affected by the worst global economic downturn in history), travelers are more willing to make this sacrifice.

To put it loosely, *happiness, comes at a cost*. But, for many, the pandemic has taught us that the most precious moments with our loved ones outweigh all else.

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