



## WORLD, INTERRUPTED

We are in a crisis. For most of us, this is an unprecedented moment: We have never experienced anything like it.

Over the last several weeks, we have watched our day-to-day grow saturated with news of global pandemic – of the very real human, health and economic costs that COVID-19 has wrought on the world. It's all we see, all we hear.

The travel industry – an industry dependent on people actually desiring (and being permitted to) travel – has a complex supply chain. Now, one with many broken links. It seems from major airlines to local guides that everyone is in limbo.

The tourism and hospitality sector directly contributes on average to the economy 4.4% of GDP, 21.5% of service exports, and 6.9% of employment in member countries of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). From major airlines to local guides, there is uncertainty everywhere. People have lost their jobs. Businesses are closing. We know this will pass, but how long will it take, who will be left standing, and where will we go from there?

We at the Global Ecotourism Network, are looking at the environmental, economic, and human impact that COVID-19 is having on the world: On the micro-businesses and entrepreneurs, boutique hotels, small tour operators, naturalist guides, and other locally-sourced (and life source-to-locals) travel businesses that have already have to reduce their staff, to close their doors, and even shutter their businesses.

We're also looking to COVID-19's impact on travelers. On the trips-of-a-lifetime put on hold. On the destination weddings and honeymoons, forever changed. On the experiences missed and the vacations in limbo, on the stress and angst this crisis has caused for travelers, too.

We are all aware of the risks, so let us talk about the opportunities that this reset offers us. First, where do we find these opportunities? Here are some general guidelines:

### 1. Take Back Control

Not everything depends on others and external factors.

Identify what you can do, even if it's just washing your hands and cleaning the closets. Or, maybe you could reach out to help the places and people you love make it through.

### 2. Buy Time

Suddenly, everything is on hold. You need the revenue to pay the bills.

What can you do to improve cash flow? Can you ask suppliers to wait? Are there people willing to help you with time and/or money to keep essential things going?



### 3. Plan for a Sustainable Future

You might have time on your hands. So, invest it in planning for when things start up again. How can you use the things you have learned to put sustainability in your life, your business, and your destination?

### 4. Learn New Skills

Think about things you always wanted to be able to do or you have now realized you should be able to do. Complete an online course, read books, practice at home. Who knows? You might find a new passion that you can apply to your travels or your business.

### 5. Ask for Help

Everyone understands that others might need help. Ask for it. And ask together.

### 6. Show Solidarity

We are all in this together.

People need people, businesses need people, and people need businesses. What collaborations are possible?

### 7. Keep People Connected

Ecotourism depends on people connecting to places: places they have visited or places they dream about visiting.

How can you use digital technology to revive memories or inspire a future visit? Remember that one of the key ingredients of ecotourism is interpretation and storytelling. Even coronavirus can be a compelling story. Are you keeping a diary?

### Applying this:

#### Destinations

So, what has changed now there are no tourists? What has improved? Are people now ready to plan for a better, more sustainable destination? How is the environment doing? How are you helping small businesses and tourism workers survive? Is there more collaboration? What information would you like to have, to move forward?

And, how are you keeping in touch with your past and future visitors?

#### Travelers

What do you want travel to look like when all this is over? Are you ready to make responsible choices?

- **Go Local:** The economic fallout from COVID-19 has already begun. Help stem the damage by choosing local businesses that employ locals and stimulate the economy. This will make an enormous difference in real, individual lives.
- **Support Small Businesses:** From boutique hotels to tiny travel agencies, small businesses have come together to support their communities during this crisis. Now, you can support them.



- **Celebrate Nature:** Now, more than ever, we understand and appreciate nature’s delicate balance. Make travel decisions that respect and even protect the environment.
- **Book Direct:** When you can, book your hotel, tours, and other activities directly. This puts more money into communities and economies that need it most.
- **Travel Purposefully:** We know that there is an environmental impact to travel. Instead of traveling more frequently, travel with greater purpose: Fly less but experience more. Vacation once but stay longer. Consume less but see more. Focus on cultural exchange, beautiful places, and lifelong memories. Make every choice with purpose.
- **Reward Good Decisions:** Spend your tourism dollars – your economic capital – in destinations that act responsibly: Countries that reacted swiftly and responsibly to the pandemic, and that prioritized public health. Nations that protect their natural resources. Places whose priorities, values and practices mimic your own.

After the reboot, it is time to regenerate and contribute to a livable world that we want to live and travel in.