

## WORLD, CHANGED?

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*At the time of writing (22/06/2020) there are more than 9 million corona virus cases and more than 450 thousand deaths. There are 124 vaccines in development, of which 10 are being trialed in humans. In some countries the number of cases is falling fast, other countries seem to have reached a plateau, but others are still on the increase. Very few countries can claim “victory over the virus” – and also that claim is endangered if safety measures are not followed. Experts warn that there can be follow-up waves, if we let our guard down.*

*The impact on the world economy has been immense and tourism (destinations, hotels and restaurants, tour operators, transportation, distribution platforms), which depends on people going places with money in their pockets, has been very badly hit. According to the UNWTO, 100% of tourism destinations have travel restrictions. The view is that 2020 is a lost year for tourism and recovery will be slow and tentative.*

*So what does this mean for tourism in general and ecotourism in particular? You have probably read articles and participated in webinars. What is needed, however, is a structure you can use to see how things are evolving and how they affect your business or destination. To understand this, let us take the tourist/visitor’s point of view as this is key to evaluating the attractiveness of a tourism destination or product.*

*Ariane Janér (Janér, 2012) of GEN uses a hierarchy of needs adapted from Maslow, that a tourist consciously or unconsciously uses to make travel decisions. And, especially, in preparing for post-COVID-19 times, this pyramid can be very useful to help plan and prioritize action.*

*Maslow (1943) argued in his Theory of Motivation, that people’s needs have a hierarchy, and these explain their motivations. At the bottom of the Maslow’s pyramid are basic survival needs and at the top is self-actualization. Though Maslow’s theory has its critics, it is a helpful way of looking at tourism.*

*Tourism is already related to self-esteem and self-actualization. Thus, we need to create a tourism motivation pyramid: what is the hierarchy of needs of tourists and how does it influence their decision making? And how does this help us to analyze what tourism might look like post-COVID-19?*

### 1) The Pyramid of Travel Desire (pre-COVID)

Traveling means venturing out of your comfort zone, making an extra effort, and spending money to come back relaxed, re-energized, and re-inspired. What many tourists are also looking for, especially in the era of “time-poverty” and “zapping”, is convenience, the ease of getting to the experience they want and getting the most out of it. Using this we can construct a Tourism Motivation Pyramid, divided in four layers or hierarchic decision levels.

### **Decision Level 1 – The Basics: How Far Off My Comfort Zone?**

People travel for a change of climate, scenery, activity, and company. Adventure may be appealing, but every traveler wants to come back safe and sound. Therefore they are very sensitive to safety and health issues in a destination. Outbreaks of dangerous infectious diseases like SARS, dengue, swine flu or terrorism attacks and natural disasters lead to canceled bookings. High prevalence of diseases like AIDS and malaria, dirty seawater, civil unrest, and high crime rates will make many potential visitors think twice before booking.

Destinations that have wonderful natural and cultural attractions but are too far out of most people's comfort zone, do not get a lot of tourists.

If this is the case, the destination needs to focus first in investing in the basics for its own population and tourists. And if the destination does not invest, accommodations or tour operators will need to invest extra to make sure that tourists return safe and healthy. They must also know how to communicate this effectively. Transparency with reliable information are the key words here.

### **Decision Level 2 – Accessibility: How Easy Is It to Get There and Around?**

Once the tourist is reassured (s)he will not go further out of the comfort zone than (s)he can handle, (s)he will start thinking about how to get there and how to get around. How much time and money will I spend to get there? This is time and money (s)he will not be able to spend in the destination, so this question is really important.

And before traveling the tourist needs information to plan the trip. If the right information is not easy to be found on the internet, in a guidebook, through friends and family or a trusted travel agent – how can you start imaging your trip?

Countries that have accessibility issues should be realistic about how many tourists they can attract. For destinations that want to cultivate “the happy few”, limits of access can also be an asset, but then the experience should be exceptional.

Alternatively, attractive destinations that are easily accessible should be extra careful to invest in sustainable stewardship if they do not want to be overrun and spoil their natural and cultural assets. Overtourism, anyone? It is caused by undermanagement.

### **Decision Level 3 – How Good Will the Tourism Experience Be?**

Once the tourist knows (s)he can get to the destination (and return safely), the focus is on the main objective. How good will the experience really be? Who can give or help me to the best experiences? Is it worth the effort? At this point there is still a possibility of a deal breaker: a price (including the cost of getting there) that is deemed not to be fair value considering the quality of experience.

#### **Decision Level 4 – How Does Sustainability Enhance the Feel Good Factor?**

Sustainability is the new self-realization. If you feel that the destination where you had a great experience is well taken care of, you are likely to recommend it to friends or take your children or grandchildren; this enhances the “feel good factor” of travel. When tourism products look similar on the “money value for experience” level, the decision-making is taken to the next level: Which product will be likely to make me *feel* better?

Sustainability at this level is the sustainability that the visitor can see. But very often the real sustainability issues lie at the bottom of the pyramid. For example, health relates to hygiene – hygiene is connected with waste management – waste management is connected with the sustainability of a place. And the COVID-19 has given us all a long time to reflect – be it as travelers, destinations or tourism service providers.



How can we use the need pyramid to start imagining the restart, recovery and reset of tourism?

#### **2) Travel Desire in COVID-19 Times**

The COVID-19 crisis has shone a very harsh light on the base of the pyramid. We are very “uncomfortable” now. Everything has grinded to a halt and businesses, big and small, are struggling to survive, many people have lost their jobs and the global GDP has taken a huge hit. Pollution levels and consumer footfalls have

gone down, travelers have disappeared... whilst the natural world seems to be reclaiming its space back. But at the same time poachers and illegal loggers see opportunities.

We are also seeing and experiencing many different responses by countries and regions to the COVID-19 threat, resulting in different caseloads, death rates and readiness for opening – and possible next waves.

Meanwhile there is still much to learn about the coronavirus itself. We are not even sure how much immunity you have after infection. We are waiting for an effective vaccine and medication. Several are in the human testing phase, but it could take time to see how safe they are, how long they will protect you and how fast production and fair, equal worldwide distribution can be scaled up. Medicine that could reduce the worst of the symptoms and decrease death rates is also not yet available. Again, there are some early leads.

The only measures we can take at the moment is being very vigilant on the basic hygiene measures and practicing physical distancing. Including its most extreme form of a complete lockdown.

We are currently in a phase where countries are opening up – but that only means that there the health care system is now coping with the caseload. Other countries are also opening because they are worried about their economy and have not convinced their populations to stay home and live with other restrictive measures as much as possible. In both cases COVID-19 can still resurge locally, regionally or in larger follow-up waves.

So let us look at the hierarchy of needs, again!

### **Decision Level 1 – Which Countries Will Let Me In and Will I Return Safe and Sound?**

*Everyone would love to travel again, but when and where can you go?*

On the one hand, nobody would like to be stranded far away from home or in a country which is in a COVID-19 crisis. On the other hand, destinations do not want to import new infections so, even if they open, arrival quarantines, sanitary protocols and activity restrictions will apply.

Tourists will have to research where they can go and if they think it is safe to go.

- ➔ Domestic and regional travel has started to pick up first.
- ➔ Countries that have been successful in their mitigation of the corona crisis have an advantage.

### **Decision Level 2 – Accessibility: How Easy Is It To Get There and Around?**

*Can I get there and back safely, and how costly will it be? That is the question!*

Even if you have researched before traveling, you know that situations can change quickly. Nobody wants to get stuck in route or feel they run into a health risk in transit.

Transportation in airplanes, trains and buses means extra hygiene measures (including use of masks, pre-travel testing) and physical distancing (less seats available). This could translate into higher ticket prices, though companies will be wary of scaring customers away when they need them most.

All airlines are in financial trouble and not all will be bailed out. They also need time to gear up because of grounded planes, retraining of staff and certainly will not fly as many routes as before for some time. They might also be careful which passengers they will be taking where.

So would-be travelers need good and up-to-date information on the measures that will be taken to reduce any contagion risks – and what happens on arrival. They need to scrutinize cancellation policies (which should stay very customer-friendly) and review their insurance coverage.

- ➔ Destinations that are easier to reach and are transparent on their COVID-19 situation and measures in place will be at an advantage.
- ➔ Transportation companies that are transparent about their hygiene precautions and inform their passengers about any restrictions or extra documents needed to travel to the destinations they serve will be preferred.
- ➔ Depending on the destination, the percentage of individual travel by car and with mobile homes might increase.

### **Decision Level 3 – Quality of the Experience: Better, Worse or Different?**

*When I get there how will my experience be affected by COVID-19? Will I have to pay more or are there attractive discounts?*

Even if the destination is “open”, how will precautions like physical distancing and visitor density affect the experience? Will travelers appreciate “extra space” or feel they cannot “relax”?

In the case of ecotourism, which by definition is *low density* there should not be much of a problem. Possibly the appreciation of wildlife viewing could actually be better, as animals might be less “shy”. Another factor is that ecotourism could ward off poachers and help local communities that depend on tourism income. However, we also know that we could pass the coronavirus to animals and so might need extra restrictions to avoid that.

And of course, what is a “fair price” for a world that is in an economic recession? Is that a price a traveler will be willing to pay? And is that price worth keeping your business open for?

### **Decision Level 4: Sustainability Consciousness – Augmented or Fragmented**

Sustainability in its essence is about healthy living space for all, which implies a healthy “Planet B”. COVID-19 can be seen as an alarm bell for what climate change could bring. But how many people have understood that message or want to hear it? Especially as the interruption of non-essential consumption

has also shown that jobs could be at risk and this could generate a backlash by some against “restrictions” and “restraints” – fragmenting the actions needed for ensuring healthy living space.

### Three Important Takeaways

**An opportunity for ecotourism** is to show the real value of nature for humans and explain how we can tread more lightly on earth, enjoy it more fully, fairly and win minds for the bigger battle of restoring that “Planet B” – avoiding the worst of climate change. Add this narrative to your interpretation and make sure you use a positive angle.

**There are no “one-size fits all” solutions.** It seems very likely that the situation might continue for one or two years and things might never go back the way they were. But is that only a bad thing? Let us take sustainability seriously for all kinds of tourism.

**To investigate your future, think for yourself.** Apply the “pyramid” to your situation and use it to keep informed about things that you need for your decisions. If you need help with that, we will be providing a separate “checklist”. It is easy to get distracted by the continuous, often overwhelming news cycle. Not everything is relevant, and many claims are simply not true. Remember “Plan or be planned for”.

Here are some useful sites to see how things are progressing:

- **COVID-19 around the world**  
<https://www.worldometers.info/coronavirus/> (The columns are rankable)
- **News on vaccines**  
<https://www.raps.org/news-and-articles/news-articles/2020/3/covid-19-vaccine-tracker>
- **Flying, anyone?**  
<https://www.iatatravelcentre.com/international-travel-document-news/1580226297.htm>
- **Clinical trials around the world (Vaccines and treatments)**  
<https://clinicaltrials.gov/ct2/results?cond=COVID-19>
- **Tourism information and sources by World Travel & Tourism Council (WTTC)**  
<https://wttc.org/en-us/COVID-19>
- **Tourism Information and Sources by UNWTO**  
<https://www.unwto.org/tourism-covid-19>
- **COVID-19 and the economy, including tourism**  
<https://www.weforum.org/focus/coronavirus-covid-19>
- **Ariane Janér 2012 article**  
<https://uakari.mamiraua.org.br/UAKARI/article/view/135>
- **Compilation of resources and articles by Dr. Anna Spenceley**  
<https://annaspenceley.wordpress.com/2020/04/02/covid-19-and-sustainable-tourism/>