

## WORLD, WHAT NOW... in 2021 and beyond?

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*We are now in 2021 and the vaccines are here, but we are far from returning to “normal”. 2020 has shown us what a pandemic can do to the world and how it impacts tourism. With new “waves”, COVID-19 infections are still rising, we are now at over 150 million cases and more than 3 million deaths (May 2021). It has been a sobering lesson.*

### **What else has changed?**

#### **1) Vaccines are here and working, but can they protect against all the variants?**

Vaccines are being distributed and more than a billion doses have been applied. There is now a good range available and until now all show good enough to particularly good efficacy and appear to have hardly any serious side effects.

So, the focus now turns to vaccinations. **How soon can we hope for a significant part of the world population to be vaccinated?** This is a question of:

#### **Approval**

For widespread distribution the vaccines must have widespread approval for (emergency) use. Approval procedures differ per country and are per vaccine. But this seems to be going well.

#### **Availability and logistics**

How quickly can the vaccines be manufactured and distributed? At the moment there are big differences by country, with rich countries doing better than poor countries. And vaccine politics are also becoming a big issue. We also need to know if the healthcare system is ready in terms of locations, people, materials and the paper chain. As nearly all vaccines require 2 doses, a good information system must be in place to see who got what when.

#### **Cost**

Including the cost for distribution, what will people have to pay? Are governments subsidizing?

#### **Protection**

Though all vaccines offer protection well over the 50% threshold, the trials haven't run for enough time to determine for how long they offer this protection. Though it is clear that the vaccines protect against

illness, it is not clear yet if a vaccinated person protects non-vaccinated others from infection. And it is already clear that vaccines do not protect as well against some of the new strains.

## Psychology

The vaccines have been developed very quickly, so there are not enough data on possible longer-term side-effects or duration of the protection. In some countries it has also become politicized. So will people rush to get vaccinated, wait to learn more or will there be resistance?

### **Travel Takeaway**

*It is not only about how effective the vaccines are (50%, 70%, 90%), but how many people perceive it as safe and important enough to get vaccinated! And we don't know yet after how much time a booster is needed, especially because of new variants.*

## **2) Testing and Health Protocols will continue in 2021 and probably beyond**

It will take time to vaccinate everyone, everywhere. There are great discrepancies per country and continent. While North America leads with over 25%, Africa and Oceania are still at less than 1% of the population vaccinated. The vaccines will need to be tweaked, if they do not offer sufficient protection against new strains.

As vaccinations get underway, more countries are looking at **vaccination “passports”** as a requirement for entry. For the time being as global vaccination rates are low, the WHO is opposed to this idea. However, IATA is already launching a **IATA Travel Pass Initiative**, the ID2020 is working with the WHO on proposals and global standards and the **Commons Project**; The World Economic Forum and a broad coalition of public and private partners are collaborating to launch **CommonPass**.

### **Travel Takeaway**

*Be prepared for continuation of health protocols for some time. Any news that might ignite concerns about the vaccine could lead to prolongation of health protocols or even lead to new measures. And, for the near future, news of possible mutations, new emerging diseases could also lead to caution. Tourism will have to take public health issues much more seriously. Proof of vaccination (like yellow fever) might become important for international travel. And will vaccines not approved in a country of destination be accepted on entry?*

### 3) Economic Strain and Recovery

The full extent of the COVID-19 crisis on the economy and tourism will become clearer over time. The **IMF** currently projects a fall in GDP of 3.5% over 2020, followed by a rise of 5.25% in 2021, but of course, business sectors have not been affected equally.

At its core, tourism focuses on people. It depends on people going places, meeting other people and relaxing. That is why it has been heavily affected, from the airline industry to the local restaurant. Approximately 1 in 10 people worldwide work in the tourism sector and at least a third of these jobs are at risk.

**IATA** estimates airlines will lose over US\$ 500 billion in revenues and resulting in losses to be around US 120 billion in 2020. Major airlines have survived by major cost-cutting and government subsidies, but they continue to be very cash-strapped. Many smaller budget airlines will not survive.

According to the **UNWTO Tourism Recovery Tracker**, international tourism arrivals were down by 74% in 2020. Hotel occupancy rates are at 34% on average for 2020, but there are differences by region. Current bookings and hotel searches are still sharply down.

Bars and restaurants and indoor attractions, which are potential infection hot spots, have been severely affected. There have been many permanent or long-term closures.

Outdoor attractions, especially in natural surroundings have fared better, as long as they can attract local/regional travelers and can manage visitors responsibly. But those that depend on markets further away are also doing poorly.

Meanwhile as the stark realities of a **Climate Emergency** become clearer to world leaders and part of the tourism industry, calls for “decarbonization” of the world economy and a “green new deal” are getting louder. What measures can and will be taken are still being discussed, but the targets are getting more ambitious. The airline industry should take note. A recent (2020) paper by Stefan Gossling et al., found that 1% of travelers (frequent fliers) were responsible for 50% of the emissions.

The tourism industry is at a crossroads, as the future of tourism is not about “business as before” anymore. It is now about restoring places people and nature and reinventing itself as part of the solution. Ecotourism can help making this possible, just as it has led the way for sustainable tourism. We all need to participate actively in the **UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration**.

#### **Travel Takeaway**

*The travel industry will do its best to get people traveling again and there is pent up demand for travel. The travel industry is already reporting increased bookings for next year especially for the third and fourth quarter. But patience and caution are needed to open and the rest of the COVID-19 pause should be used also to plan for tourism in a world in a climate emergency.*

*More than ever the principles of ecotourism can help people plan for the future.*

**Sources:**

- **COVID-19 Infections and deaths:** <https://www.worldometers.info/coronavirus/>
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- **Travel Pass:** <https://www.iata.org/en/programs/passenger/travel-pass/>
- **UNWTO Recovery Tracker:** <https://www.unwto.org/unwto-tourism-recovery-tracker>
- **Common Pass:** <https://commonpass.org/>
- **UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration:** <https://www.decadeonrestoration.org/>