

## **The end of tourism?**

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In 1992 Francis Fukuyama published his now famous “classic” *The End of History and the Last Man*. Fukuyama was not writing about the end of the world, but rather the end point in liberal democratic ascendancy. Fukuyama stated that: not just ... the passing of a particular period of post-war history, but the end of history as such: That is, the end-point of mankind's ideological evolution and the universalization of Western liberal democracy as the final form of human government"<sup>1</sup>. In reality Fukuyama was not writing from a negative outlook but rather from what we in the West would see as a perspective of hope for a brighter future. During these last few months, however, many a leader in world tourism has asked him or herself if we are not seeing the “end of tourism” as least as how we have understood it in the first decades of the twenty-first century. There is little doubt that the world tourism industry is facing its greatest crisis. With restaurants and places of public entertainment closed, hotels barely open if at all, and the airline industry in crisis, the fundamentals of tourism have come to a halt. The irony is that only a few short months ago, the world first heard about a possibly new and deadly virus called the Coronavirus (CoVid-19). In fact as late as January of 2020 the World Health Organization tweeted that there was no evidence that the Coronavirus would spread between humans. The WHO stated (January 14, 2020): that: “Preliminary investigations conducted by the Chinese authorities have found no clear evidence of human-to-human transmission of the novel #coronavirus (2019-nCoV)

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<sup>1</sup> Fukuyama, Francis (1989). "The End of History?". *The National Interest* (16): 3–18. [ISSN 0884-9382](https://doi.org/10.2805/16-1)

identified in #Wuhan, #China,” the organization had said.”<sup>2</sup>. Just a few days later, January 18) the WHO slightly modified its position stating that:

“The World Health Organization reports there is no evidence of human-to-human spread of the new coronavirus that has sickened dozens, but says the possibility cannot be ruled out. Investigations are continuing, aimed at identifying the source of the new Coronavirus. Late last year, China reported a cluster of cases of pneumonia of unknown cause. Many were linked to a fish market in Wuhan, central China’s largest city. The World Health Organization reports 41 people have been infected with the disease in China, including two deaths.”<sup>3</sup>

In the first two months of 2020 what at first appeared to be a few isolated cases of an unknown form of influenza in a faraway province of China. Then in almost Biblical proportions a worldwide pandemic became a reality. It was a pandemic that would kill thousands and has turned the world’s economies upside down. Leisure travel and tourism depend on strong economies and are highly vulnerable to economic undulations. We may well say of it that when the economy sneezes tourism catches pneumonia.

Prior to the outbreak of the worldwide Covid-19 pandemic tourism and travel were enjoying perhaps their greatest and most successful years. For example, the United Nation’s World Tourism Organization (WTO) stated that: “travel and tourism is one of the world’s largest industries. It “surpasses that of oil exports, food products or automobiles.” Travel and tourism in the United States creates massive economic

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<sup>2</sup> <https://nypost.com/2020/03/20/who-haunted-by-old-tweet-saying-china-found-no-human-transmission-of-coronavirus/> <accessed on April 11, 2020>

<sup>3</sup> Lisa Schlein: Voice of America: <https://www.voanews.com/science-health/who-does-not-rule-out-human-human-spread-new-coronavirus> <accessed on April 11, 2020>

impacts in local, state, as well as national levels.”<sup>4</sup> Tourism was so successful that political and economic leaders coined the word “overtourism”. Tourism’s over-success was noted in an August 2019 article published in Forbes. The article dealing with the reality of “overtourism” stated:

"Overtourism" is when too many tourists overwhelm a destination, shifting the balance from a positive experience to one where tourism becomes unsustainable.

The World Travel & Tourism Council partnered with McKinsey & Company to produce a [study on the effects of overtourism](#). The results were boiled down to five challenges associated with overtourism:

- Alienated local residents
- Degraded tourist experience
- Overloaded infrastructure
- Damage to nature
- Threats to culture and heritage”<sup>5</sup>

Cities such as Venice and Barcelona grappled with their over-success and its consequences for long-term sustainability

To add to tourism’s woes the world’s stock exchanges entered into an economic rollercoaster, with the market plunging and then rebounding and leaving the public fearful to spend money. The economic uncertainties meant that in many locations hotels emptied, airlines have cancelled hundreds of flights and the cruise industry has ground to a halt. The contraction of the major tourism components has meant that the secondary components of the tourism industry have also either basically stopped functioning or come to a complete stop.

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<sup>4</sup> <https://angeloueeconomics.com/keep-up-with-ae/economic-impact-of-travel-and-tourism-in-the-united-states-angeloueeconomics/> <accessed on April 11, 2020>

<sup>5</sup> *Forbes*: <https://www.forbes.com/sites/johnnyjet/2018/08/20/how-is-overtourism-impacting-travel-to-popular-destinations/#215c625935b8> <accessed on April 11, 2020>

This major tourism industry contraction has forced other secondary or dependent industries also to lay off workers creating still additional economic hardships. Air and seaports now reject passengers from the most infected locations or force them into quarantine. Medical personnel from around the world are scrabbling to find cures and possible vaccines; trying to stop the disease's spread and possible mutation. Furthermore, because this disease is so contagious multiple front-line medical personnel have also become ill and thus creating a shortage of doctors, nurses and other medical personnel. The shortage has forced the Center for Disease Control in Atlanta Georgia to issue guidelines for understaffed health care facilities. The guidelines read”

“Adjusting staff schedules, hiring additional HCP, and rotating HCP to positions that support patient care activities.

- Cancel all non-essential procedures and visits. Shift HCP who work in these areas to support other patient care activities in the facility. Facilities will need to ensure these HCP have received appropriate orientation and training to work in these areas that are new to them.
- Attempt to address social factors that might prevent HCP from reporting to work such as transportation or housing if HCP live with vulnerable individuals.
- Identify additional HCP to work in the facility. Be aware of state-specific emergency waivers or changes to licensure requirements or renewals for select categories of HCP.
- Request that HCP postpone elective time off from work.”<sup>6</sup>

Another outcome of the Covid-19 virus is fear. Fears often provoked by emotions have caused runs on supermarkets and on facemasks, and even shortages of toilet paper. These fears also translate into the fact that many in the public are now and may in the future be fearful of travel.

The impact of the World Health Organization having declared Covid-19 to be a worldwide crisis, has provoked numerous actions. For the United States' government has now earmarked almost eight billion dollars to fight the disease, and over two trillion dollars to help reset the economy. The United States and European governments are

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<sup>6</sup> CDC <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/hcp/mitigating-staff-shortages.html>  
<accessed on April 11, 2020>

not alone in their actions. The great majority of tourism-oriented nations have closed their borders and prepared quarantine centers. Saudi Arabia has stopped pilgrimages to its holy cities, the Vatican has now closed its museum Easter Sunday's mass was viewed on television by the faithful, and whole nations from Italy to Israel, from the United Kingdom to Peru are now basically in a national quarantine.

Perhaps no industry has been hurt as much as the travel and tourism industry, especially that part of the industry that deals with the leisure traveler. The travel and tourism industry depends on visitors being able to travel freely from one location to another. For example in an April 1, 2020 study on the impact of the Covid-19 crisis on Egyptian tourism Clemens Breisinger (et.al) states: "The economic impacts of the COVID-19 crisis are increasingly hitting low- and middle-income countries and the poor. International travel restrictions and the full or partial closure of businesses and industries in Asia, Europe, and North America have led to a collapse in global travel and are expected to reduce the flows of remittances. Tourism and remittances are important sources of employment and incomes for the poor, respectively."<sup>7</sup> The authors then go on to state: "The pandemic is likely to have a significant economic toll. For each month that the COVID-19 crisis persists, our simulations using IFPRI's Social Accounting Matrix (SAM) multiplier model for Egypt suggest national GDP could fall by between 0.7% and 0.8% (EGP 36-41 billion or \$2.3-\$2.6 billion). Household incomes are likely to fall, particularly among the poor."<sup>8</sup> What is true for Egypt can be replicated throughout the world. The United Nations Trade and Development agency predicts: "...a slowdown in the global economy to under two per cent for this year, and that will probably cost in the order of \$1 trillion, compared with what people were forecasting back in September,"

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<sup>7</sup> <https://www.ifpri.org/blog/economic-impact-covid-19-tourism-and-remittances-insights-egypt> <accessed on April 11, 2020>

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said Richard Kozul-Wright, Director, Division on Globalization and Development Strategies at UNCTD<sup>9</sup>

Depending on how the virus mutates, spreads, the consequences of these cancellations might last for years. The results are not only loss of money but also prestige and reputation. Additionally, the tourism industry must survive in an age of twenty-four, seven-day-a-week worldwide news. The result is that what happens in one location around the world is almost instantaneously known throughout the entire world. Media pressure not only means that individuals will shy away from such locations but also that local governments throughout the world feel obliged to take added precautions, so as not to suffer reputational or political consequences. From the perspective of tourism, a health crisis quickly becomes a tourism crisis.

Public health officials, doctors, and scientists are still unclear as to all of the science behind the CoVid-19. Nations such as France, Germany, Israel and the United States are desperately trying to develop a vaccine, but vaccines need to be tested before they can be released and will have to be updated should the virus mutate. What medical personnel do know is that this virus is related to a number of ailments that have plagued humanity for centuries. From the common cold to multiple strands of influenza and the S.A.R.S. virus, a virus from the early part of the twenty-first century that had devastating effects on tourism in such places as Hong Kong and Toronto, Canada.

Health officials still do not know is if those carrying the disease are aware that they are carriers or not. The fact that large numbers of infected people might be carriers without knowing creates whole new problems for both the medical and for the tourism industry.

The fact that we still do not have clear understanding of Covid-19 can become the basis for both rational and irrational behavior and tourism survive in a world of irrational

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<sup>9</sup> <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2020/03/coronavirus-covid-19-cost-economy-2020-un-trade-economics-pandemic/> <accessed on April 11, 2020>

fears. For this reason alone, the economic panic that the fear of Covid-19 causes might be as destructive or more destructive than the virus itself. Tourism is based on perceptions and negative perceptions can prove deadly to the world of tourism. The fact Covid-19 dominates the news around the world means that an unintended consequence of social distancing might be the loss of income by millions of people around the world, especially the lowest wage earners. Jesse Rothstein, professor of public policy and economics at the University of California Berkley has written: The biggest threat posed by the covid-19 outbreak is, of course, the health risks it poses. But that is not the only risk: Avoidance, social distancing and panic may have enormous economic consequences, large enough to significantly slow growth, push up unemployment and even tip the economy into a recession.

On this front, the most vulnerable people are low-wage workers in low-income households without paid leave. Many employers are already telling their white-collar workers to work from [home](#). But low-wage workers such as janitors, food service workers and retail cashiers can't work remotely, and they also often work for contractors with less-enlightened policies. If these workers are temporarily idled by specific quarantines, school closures affecting their children or workplace closures motivated by general social distancing efforts, they won't get paid. Their families tend to have little savings and live in an economically precarious state even in good [times](#). Without work, these families face near-term risks of intense economic hardship and possible eviction.”<sup>10</sup>

The law of unintended consequences is no strange to the world of tourism. Tourism specialists have long recognized that what they believed to have been purely positive later is discovered to have produced negative consequences along with the positive results. The onset of Covid-19 might hold multiple consequences for the tourism industry and it is essential that industry leaders recognize these consequences and

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<sup>10</sup> <https://blogs.berkeley.edu/2020/03/10/the-economic-consequences-of-social-distancing/>  
<accessed on April 11, 2020>

prepare for a world in which rapid travel not only unites us but also allows for the spread of multiple pandemics.

Post-covid-19 tourism officials will need to deal with constant new realities and limit their wishful thinking. All of us often tend to believe what we want to believe. Tourism officials will need to make decisions that are based on facts and not on desires. In times such as these clear precise planning and thinking not only saves lives but produces economic viability. The tourism industry might see travel reluctance by large numbers of people. This reluctance to travel could result in some, or all, of the following:

Once the pandemic has subsided there could be fewer people traveling. This reduction will hurt those working in the travel industry. On the other hand, it could help the tourism industry to develop sustainable and ecological models for the future. Another possible outcome is decreased lodging occupancy resulting not only in loss of income but also jobs. This decrease however might force the lodging industry to reexamine its sanitation and health guidelines, provide improved cleanliness and assure that all who are working in the lodging and food industries have adequate health and absenteeism protection. Still another potential consequence in the post-pandemic world is that governments may not be able to see the tourism industry as a cash-cow, such a loss of taxes would mean that governments will have to find new revenue streams and that over-taxation might result in even greater loss of revenue.

As is the case with many crises, crises present us with both dangers and opportunities. There appears little doubt that as the pandemic wanes the world will see a very different tourism industry. Tourism will continue to exist. People will still desire to travel and need to travel. What we do not know is what the tourism industry will look like after the fog lifts and realities set in. What is certain is that the tourism industry of the twenty-first century's first two decades will not be the same.



Just as in the case when the tourism industry faced major paradigm changes after the September 11th terrorism attacks in 2001, it is wise for government and industry leaders to review some of the basics when dealing with a tourism crisis and then consider what changes needed to be made so as to recover from the current pandemic and to be prepared for the next. The recent pandemic ought to be a lesson on how vulnerable the tourism industry is to panics. This is not the first time that the tourism industry has faced crises. The 1959 flue, the S.A.R.S. virus, H9NI virus were all challenges to the tourism industry. These medical emergencies ought to remind the tourism industry that leisure, and even business travel, are choices and not obligations. When travelers become afraid they simply cancel their trips. These trip cancellations often result massive layoffs of tourism workers whose jobs suddenly disappear.

**- Travel is not about marketing but about product, safety and security.** A major lesson that the tourism industry needs to learn is that it cannot “market” itself out of every problem. No tourism entity has the economic ability to compete with a 24 hour 7 day a week new cycle. When the public does not feel safe it stops coming no matter how good your marketing might be.

**Put the human factor back into tourism.** For too long the tourism industry has been about numbers and profits. The covid -19 crisis has given the tourism industry a chance to re-humanize its product. That means that the hospitality industry needs to be individual based and not group based. For example, have flexible cancellation policies in place. This principle is not only important for tourism group organizers and travel agents, but also for airlines and hotels. Airline tickets are the only item that once purchased cannot be returned or given to someone else. Travel should be fun rather than a hassle or a gamble.

**-Develop easy to use creative multilingual websites so that people can gain information any time of the day and without regards to where they may be located.** Provide free Internet service during the pandemic. Use the websites not only as a way to provide

information but also as a means to provide reassurance. On the other hand, be careful not to become so technical that you lose the human touch. Travel is about personal interactions and not about human-machine interaction. No one is loyal to a machine! Humans however create memories and tourism is about the selling of experiences and memories.

**-Work with both the traditional and social media outlets.** A pandemic is like any other tourism crisis and should be treated as such. The tourist industry needs not only to give the media accurate information to encourage the media to say what you are doing to protect the traveling public, but it also needs to create social media campaigns to counter the misinformation that is currently circulating around the world.

**-Do not forget that the people employed in the tourism industry and their family members can also get sick.** When tourism employees and their families become susceptible to illnesses, there are not only labor shortages, but also personal challenges. Without employees tourism cannot provide needed services and the system can easily become overwhelmed. Provide employees with the best health care possible, and create systems where sick employees do not fear not coming to work. Develop plans on how to maintain sufficient services while suffering from manpower shortages.

**Make health a major component of tourism security.** Not only should you have to care for visitors who might fall ill but provide extra water and vitamin C. Make sure that you work with the local medical professionals and that you have lists of medical personnel who are multi-lingual. Medical notifications and warnings will need to be distributed in multiple languages. Make sure that not only do employees use anti bacterial hand wipes and but also provide these in travelers' rooms. For example, hand-wipes can be used to sanitize remote controls and other items that are frequently touched and rarely cleaned. It is important that these hand-wipes contain at least 60% alcohol to be effective. Furthermore tourism officials need to understand the current terminology. We define

an epidemic as an infectious disease that is prevalent in a specific region or area. A pandemic is an epidemic that has crossed major regions, impacted whole countries or spread throughout the world. An epidemic or pandemic may be mild, severe, or deadly.

**-Tourism professionals need to be well informed about the state of the world.** In a world of rapidly changing medical news and political decisions, tourism leaders need real time and accurate information. Consult multiple news sources on a regular basis. Governments are reacting quickly and decisively to quarantined problems and stop them before potential problems become worse. This means that all tourism professionals, including hoteliers, restaurant owners and attraction managers need to have alternative plans in case borders are closed, flights or cruises are cancelled, or new illnesses develop.

**-Create tourism products that build on local product and promote healthy living and aid the community.** All too often even local tourism souvenirs have been nothing more than reproductions made somewhere else. The post-covid-19 world might help the tourism industry to return to authenticity rather than inexpensive replication. Tourism may want to act locally and find ways to support local industries and food producers.

**-Cleanliness and good sanitation are essential.** That means that sheets need to be changed regularly, public devices need to be disinfected on a regular basis, and personnel who feel ill should be encouraged to stay home. The tourism and travel industry needs to reconsider its policies vis-à-vis such issues as:

- Lack of public sanitation on city streets or at terminals
- Issues of blankets both at hotels and on airplanes
- Regular employee washing of hands with soap and hot water
- Public restroom cleanliness
- Personnel in direct contact with the public such as wait-staffs, hotel cleaning services,

and front desk personnel need to have regular medical check-ups to assure the public that another colleague or guest has not inadvertently infected them.

Have we reached the end of tourism? Despite the fact that some in the tourism industry think they might be living the first half of verse 4 of the 23<sup>rd</sup> psalm, we need to be mindful of the second half of the stanza. We might be walking through what feels like a valley of the shadow of death but if we fear no evil and work together then the best of tourism is yet to come. <sup>11</sup>

No, this is not the end of tourism, but in order to survive tourism will have to remember that it is not about numbers or widgets but about people. The future of the tourism industry might be very different but the human being is the same, and our need to travel will always be a subset of our need to interact with other human beings.

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<sup>11</sup> Verse reads: “Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil.” (Psalm: 23: 4)