

COVID-19 Tourism Impact Update



Falkland Islands Tourism Sector Information and Guidance Concerning the Impact of COVID-19

No. 13

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INTRODUCTION

With spring in the air and summer around the corner, this will be a tourist season like no other we have experienced for a long time. With the Tourist Recovery Incentive Programme (TRIP) up and running, I hope that we can make as much of the summer as possible, and even enjoy some time to relax that wouldn't usually be possible. However, for most businesses that pleasure will be tinged with the loss of revenue from what was looking like another bumper season.

Now the *domestic season* is underway, we've refocussed on the international visitor again in this issue of *COVID-19 Update*. I don't know when the Falklands will be open again for these visitors, but sincerely hope it will be in time for the 2020-2021 season. Consequently, we've identified the key needs of the COVID-19 traveller, as we must be ready, and that starts from now.

COVID-19 has now been with us (in the world) long enough to make quite a stark impact on travellers, so I am confident that what is included in this report will remain relevant for some time. Most (or even all) of it may not be new to you, but it's a good reminder. We need to adapt, change and be ready!

As always, please don't hesitate to contact the Falkland Islands Tourist Board for more details or any further assistance.



Stephanie Middleton
Executive Director
30th October 2020

Next Update: Friday 27th November 2020

THE CURRENT SITUATION

Whilst airlines are getting back into the skies and destinations are opening up, compared to normal things are still pretty quiet in the tourism sector. The chart to the right shows the percentage change in international tourists worldwide for the period January – August 2020 compared to the same period in 2019. Whilst the low point came in April and May, the line is expected to start dipping again after August.



Just over one-half (53%) of all countries worldwide have eased their travel restrictions and now allow entry (albeit with restrictions) for visitors. Notably:

- Destinations that have eased travel restrictions generally have high or very high levels of health and hygiene infrastructure. They also tend to have comparatively low COVID-19 infection rates.
- Within advanced economies, 79% of tourism destinations have already eased restrictions. In emerging economies, just 47% of destinations have done so.
- 64% of those destinations that have eased restrictions have a high or medium dependence on air as a mode of transport for international tourism arrivals.

At the same time, many destinations around the world are extremely cautious about easing travel restrictions they introduced in response to the pandemic and some have passed severe measures in an attempt to keep their citizens safe. 43% of all worldwide destinations continue to have their borders completely closed to tourism, of which around one-third have had their borders completely closed for at least 30 weeks.



Furthermore, more than half of all destinations with borders completely closed to tourism are classified as being among the World's Most Vulnerable Countries. More than half of destinations with full restrictions still in place are also highly dependent on aviation, with at least 70% of their tourist arrivals coming by air, causing significant connectivity impacts for their citizens and economies.

So are things getting any better? Yes and no! Countries are finding ways of opening up to tourism in a way that minimises risk, however at the same time the increasing rates of infection in Europe means that some countries (such as France) are locking down again, therefore suppressing travel. The next six months will be difficult for most destinations that rely on tourism.

THE NEEDS OF THE COVID-19 TRAVELLER

We've taken a look at one of the biggest and most recent surveys (by Expedia) of international travellers to find out what matters to them when travelling in this COVID-era. Whilst COVID has been with us less than a year, travellers (in particular long-haul travellers) have become mature and savvy very quickly, and there are some very clear messages that cannot now be ignored.

In summary, the main things to think about and take action on:

- **Cleanliness** will remain top of the mind for most travellers with two key dimensions: the traveller's perspective (recent guest reviews) and new enhanced cleanliness procedures at accommodation, restaurants, cafés, etc.
- **Flexibility to cancel** without penalty boosts booking confidence.
- **Access to information on travel restrictions** and quarantine measures is essential during trip planning.
- **Online ratings and reviews** have more importance than ever before.

Cleanliness is top of the mind

Cleanliness has always been important, but COVID-19 has emphasised its importance. Expedia's survey of European and North American travellers shows that more consumers are listing health and safety (72%) and avoiding crowds (68%) as top concerns over budget (60%) during trip planning.

Travellers also find information on accommodation and airline cleaning processes critical when considering travel. They want to understand the precautions providers are taking to keep them safe, and knowing what is being done has a positive impact on traveller confidence concerning safety.

Travellers also want a quick way to identify properties that are following guidelines to maintain safety and cleanliness – 51% of travellers say they will pay more attention to the cleanliness of their accommodation prior to booking. Also, online travel reviews are perceived as the best source for cleanliness information – 43% of survey respondents indicated they will be looking for reviews mentioning cleanliness.



For us, here in the Falklands, what can we do?

- Provide hand sanitiser.
- Create your own “advanced” cleaning schedule between guests (in rooms, restaurant tables, etc) but be sure to make this known through signs or notices.
- Be accredited to official sanitisation guidelines (this is something FITB/FIG are looking at developing).

Flexibility to cancel without penalty

With so much uncertainty impacting holiday plans this year, many travellers are opting for plans that can be easily adjusted, cancelled or rescheduled. The ability to change plans without penalty will give them greater flexibility to plan with more confidence.

Clear communication and transparency about cancellation policies and consequences of last-minute changes and cancellations are key aspects that determine whether travellers proceed with a booking. A commonly heard quote is: *“It’s all about the cancellation policy. I’m not booking now because I fear the refund policies. I don’t want to lose money”*.



This is becoming more important than ever. Most airlines now allow flights to be changed without penalty, so the focus is on the destinations (accommodation, tours, etc) and how flexible they are. With infections rising again in many countries, uncertainty of travel is possibly higher than it was in the summer when consumers felt things were getting better. Many travellers have had bad experiences from bookings they made over a year ago before the pandemic struck, and are determined not to lose out again. So they are smarter and tougher than ever on cancellation policies.

For us, here in the Falklands, what can we do?

- Ensure that cancellation policies are clear for all bookings.
- Make sure that bookings can be changed without penalty.
- More than anything else, make sure the message about bookings being flexible is bold and clear, so it is one of the first things travellers see; give them the confidence they need!

Travellers are becoming more cost conscious

Though getting the best value for money has always been a focus for most travellers, the economic impact of the pandemic has increased cost consciousness. Travellers are interested in cost-effective trips and value-added promotions, and discounts are expected to play a key role in traveller behaviour.

To an extent, this trend has less relevance in the Falklands as we are a long-haul destination and most travellers treat a visit to the Islands as a “once-in-a-lifetime dream holiday”, although many then come back as they have enjoyed their experience so much. There is a thought process that says the demographic of visitors to the Falklands may largely be unaffected by the pandemic, or they may even be better off when it passes and they can travel again. However, it would be dangerous to think this applies to all potential visitors. Getting people travelling again will require some inertia and we need to stand out as other destinations will be offering special promotions.



For us, here in the Falklands, what can we do?

- Consider special offers for the 2020-2021 season (discounts, free tours, etc).
- If we're not providing discounts, make sure our marketing is good, focussing on what we know are current trends: open space, fresh air, no crowds, etc.

Access to information on travel restrictions

With the quickly shifting travel restrictions and quarantine measures worldwide, travellers consider it absolutely critical to be aware of the regulations in place where they are travelling to. They want to know about quarantine measures and pandemic levels at the destination, and to understand the logistics and potential restrictions during travel.

Whilst this is partly the role of FITB and FIG, not all travellers will be looking at these websites. This is so important that it is everyone's responsibility, especially when the time comes for the Falklands to open up and welcome travellers again. However, take care, this information needs regular updating and there's nothing worse than information that is out of date to ruin traveller confidence!



For us, here in the Falklands, what can we do?

- Make sure you keep abreast of the latest restrictions and measures.
- Provide very clear instructions on what travellers need to do on arrival in the Falklands through your websites, Facebook and other marketing.
- If there are any specific guidelines for flights to the Falklands, provide these too.

Online ratings and reviews have more authority than before

Travellers are increasingly turning to social media to inform their booking decisions and find the confidence to travel again. User-generated content such as ratings and reviews (from on sites such as TripAdvisor) are hugely influential in trip planning, with 95% of travellers reading online reviews before booking a trip.

In times of uncertainty, endorsements by other travellers are guiding the levels of interest and booking patterns of potential travellers.



For us, here in the Falklands, what can we do?

- Now is the time to get online as much as possible...this is only going to get more important – start with a website. If you've got that, ensure you're on Facebook and consider Instagram.
- Sign up to TripAdvisor, it is the No.1 go-to site for people checking out places to go, sleep, see and do.
- Use this summer to boost your reviews from domestic visitors (hopefully you'll get plenty through TRIP)!

FURTHER INFORMATION

Tourism Recovery Incentive Programme

TRIP is a domestic tourism stimulus scheme that is open to everyone who is ordinarily resident in the Falkland Islands and will run from 1st October 2020 until 31st March 2021. More details can be found at:

<https://fig.gov.fk/covid-19/tourismscheme>

FIG Guidance and Information

For guidance and information for individual businesses operating in a COVID-19 environment, including restaurants, public houses and retail, as well as frequently asked questions see:

<https://fig.gov.fk/covid-19/guidance>

<https://fig.gov.fk/covid-19/information/general-information>

<https://fig.gov.fk/covid-19/faq>

