

VIETNAM NATIONAL TOURISM ADMINISTRATION
INSTITUTE FOR TOURISM DEVELOPMENT RESEARCH

CONFERENCE PROCEEDINGS

**SAFETY FOR TOURISTS DURING THE PANDEMIC
- RECOVERY TOURISM INDUSTRY
AFTER THE OUTBREAK OF THE COVID-19**



Hanoi, Oct 2021

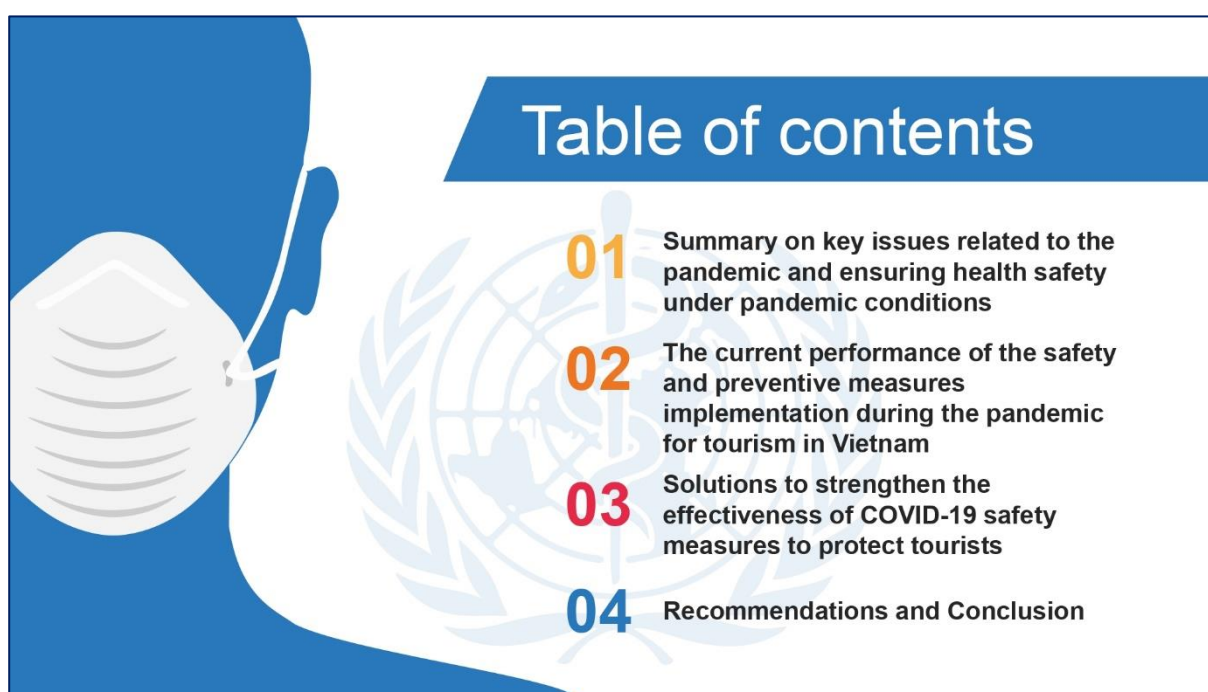
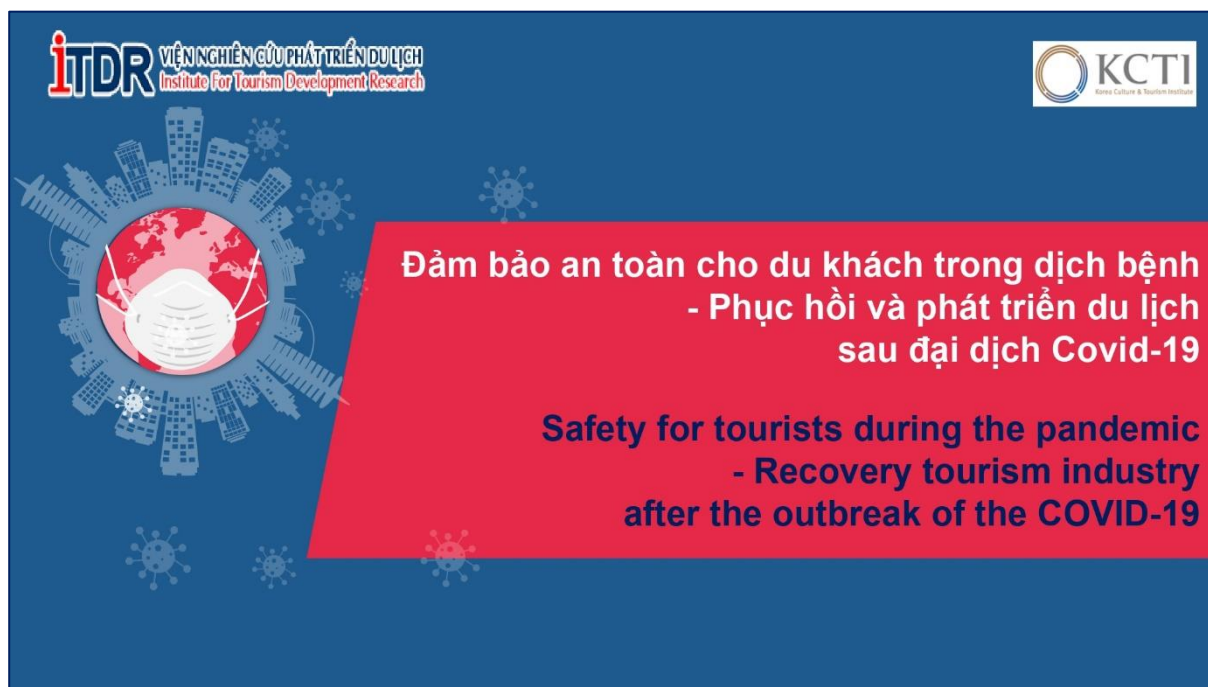
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SAFETY FOR TOURISTS DURING THE PANDEMIC - RECOVERY TOURISM INDUSTRY AFTER THE OUTBREAK OF THE COVID-19

MBA. Nguyen Thi Lan Huong

- Deputy Head of Research management & International cooperation division, ITDR



Introduction



Summary on key issues related to the pandemic and ensuring health safety under pandemic conditions

Determination of a public health emergency of international concern

Public Health Emergency of International Concern –PHEIC is an extraordinary event which is determined, as provided in these regulations:

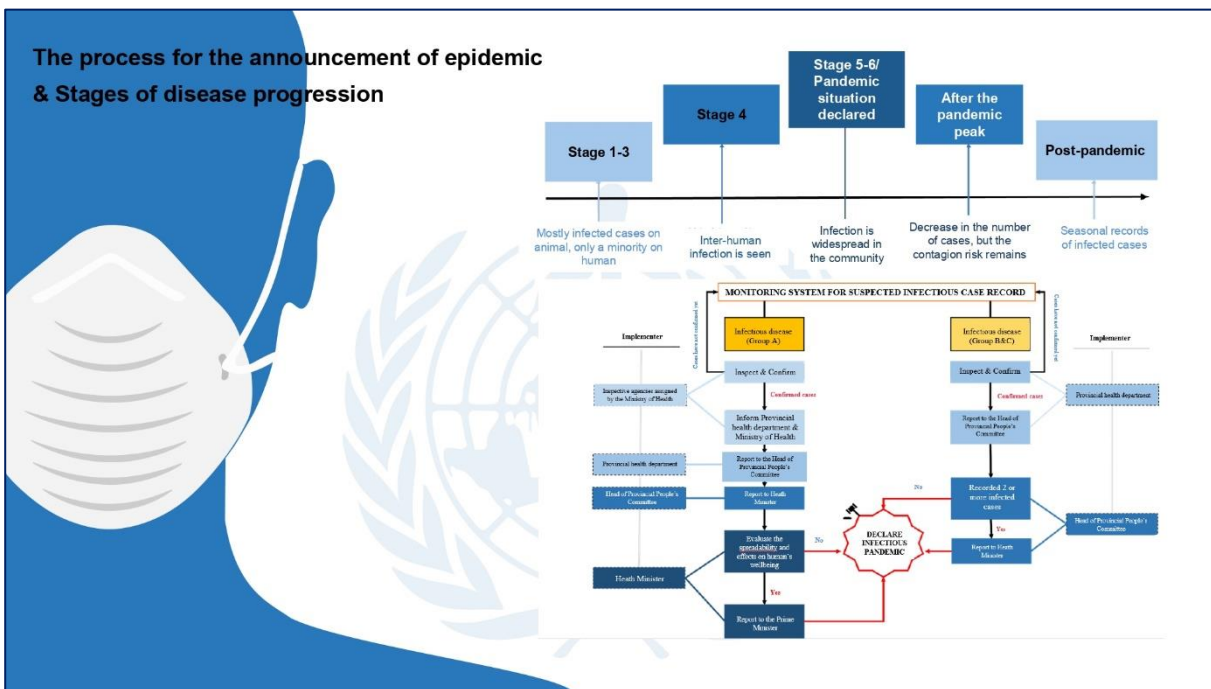
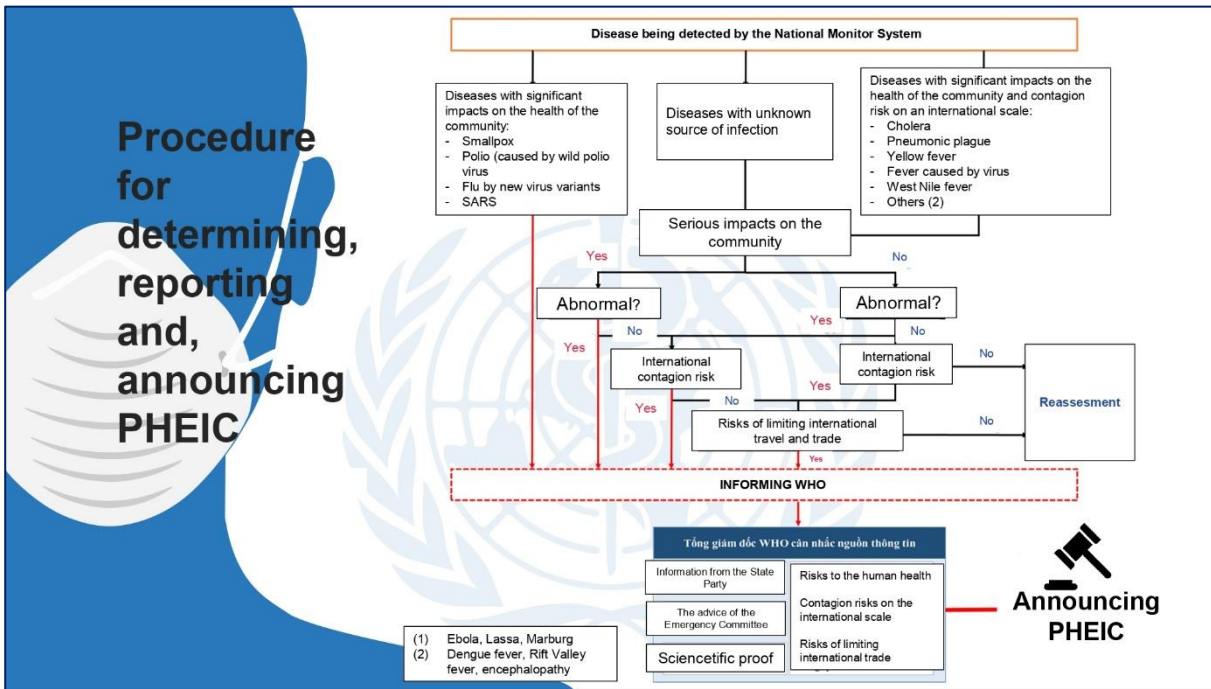
- To constitute a public health risk to (an)other State(s) through the international spread of disease.
- To potentially require an orchestrated international response

Determining the scale of the disease:

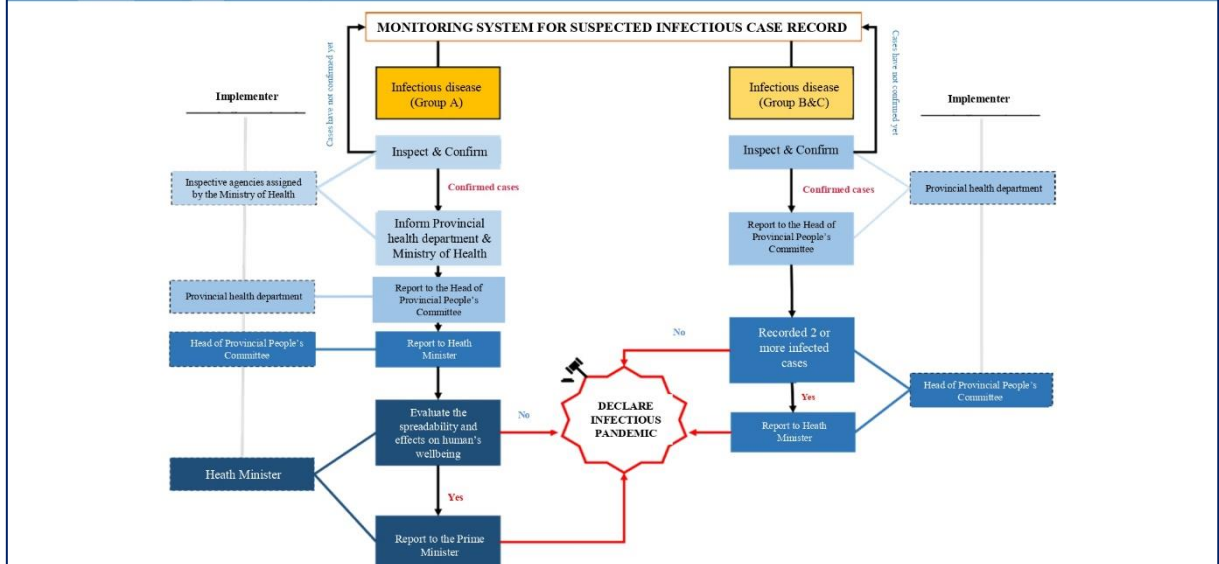
World Health Organization (WHO), Emergency Committee and State Parties at where the disease occurred work together for the scale determination (Following Article 12 – International Health Regulations 2005)

Key information sources to evaluate an event constitutes a PHEIC:

- Information provided by the State Party;
- The advice of the Emergency Committee;
- Scientific principles as well as the available scientific evidence and other relevant information
- An assessment of the risk to human health, of the risk of international spread of disease and of the risk of interference with international traffic.



PHEIC announcement

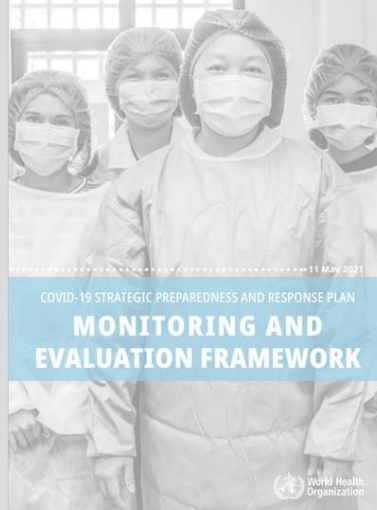


Regulations on disease preventive measures for tourists

General regulations

To countries

- Implementing medical examination or reviewing of medical examination and necessary tests; Implementing vaccination or reviewing proof of vaccination for all arrivals. Passengers those are suspected to be infected must undergo a medical quarantine; infected people must be isolated and treated to detect and prevent spread of the disease on an international scale.
- Closely monitoring suspected passengers and infected people (by test results and clinical signs)
- Issuing and informing quarantine officers and health officials the vaccination requirements and necessary preventive measures for passengers on departure and arrival following the National law
- Respecting the dignity, human rights, basic freedoms of passengers and ensuring the conveniences for passengers.



(Regulations issued by WHO)

General regulations

To passengers

- Implementing health and travel declarations to the authority. Providing information related to their destinations or accommodation to ensure that they are able to be contacted when needed.
- Providing information about travel history.
- Preparing and providing health records, including vaccination and quarantine certificates, if required.
- Cooperating with quarantine staff and medical staff when necessary.

International travel regulations during the COVID-19 pandemic

Scenario 1: The COUNTRY(IES) OF DEPARTURE (or sum of multiple countries assessed) has a projected case incidence within 14 days lower than or equal to that of COUNTRY OF DESTINATION.

- For inbound travel, the impact of imported cases from the COUNTRY(IES) OF DEPARTURE on the epidemiological situation in COUNTRY OF DESTINATION is relatively low.
- If the COUNTRY OF DESTINATION has no (active) cases, imported/sporadic cases or a small number of clusters and a low risk tolerance, the need for supplementary measures may be weighed in line with the considerations outlined in the section on risk mitigation measures for resuming travel.

Scenario 2: The COUNTRY(IES) OF DEPARTURE has a projected case incidence within 14 days higher than the COUNTRY OF THE DESTINATION, and the COUNTRY OF DESTINATION has adequate capacities to cope with the increased burden.

- The impact of imported cases from the COUNTRY(IES) OF DEPARTURE on the epidemiological situation in the COUNTRY OF DESTINATION may be high in relative terms, depending on the travel volume(s). However, the COUNTRY OF DESTINATION has adequate capacities to cope with the increased burden.
- Supplementary measures at the average level should be implemented, depends on the public health and health system response capacity and the risk tolerance level of the COUNTRY OF DESTINATION.

Scenario 3: The COUNTRY(IES) OF DEPARTURE has a projected case incidence within 14 days higher than the COUNTRY OF THE DESTINATION, and the COUNTRY OF DESTINATION has NO adequate capacities to cope with the increased burden.

- The impact of imported cases from the COUNTRY(IES) OF DEPARTURE on the epidemiological situation in the COUNTRY OF DESTINATION may be high in relative terms, depending on the travel volume(s) and the COUNTRY OF DESTINATION has no adequate capacities to cope with the increased burden.
- Supplementary measures at the highest level should be implemented
- Consideration may be given to allowing international travel from selected countries assessed, as long as the total increased burden does not exceed available capacities

Risk assessment tool to inform mitigation measures for international travel in the context of COVID-19 by WHO, issued 16th December 2020.


Summary on ensuring the safety for tourists under pandemic conditions

Types of safety:

- Physical health safety
- Mental health safety
- Financial safety





Responsibilities of tourism stakeholders in providing tourists' safety:

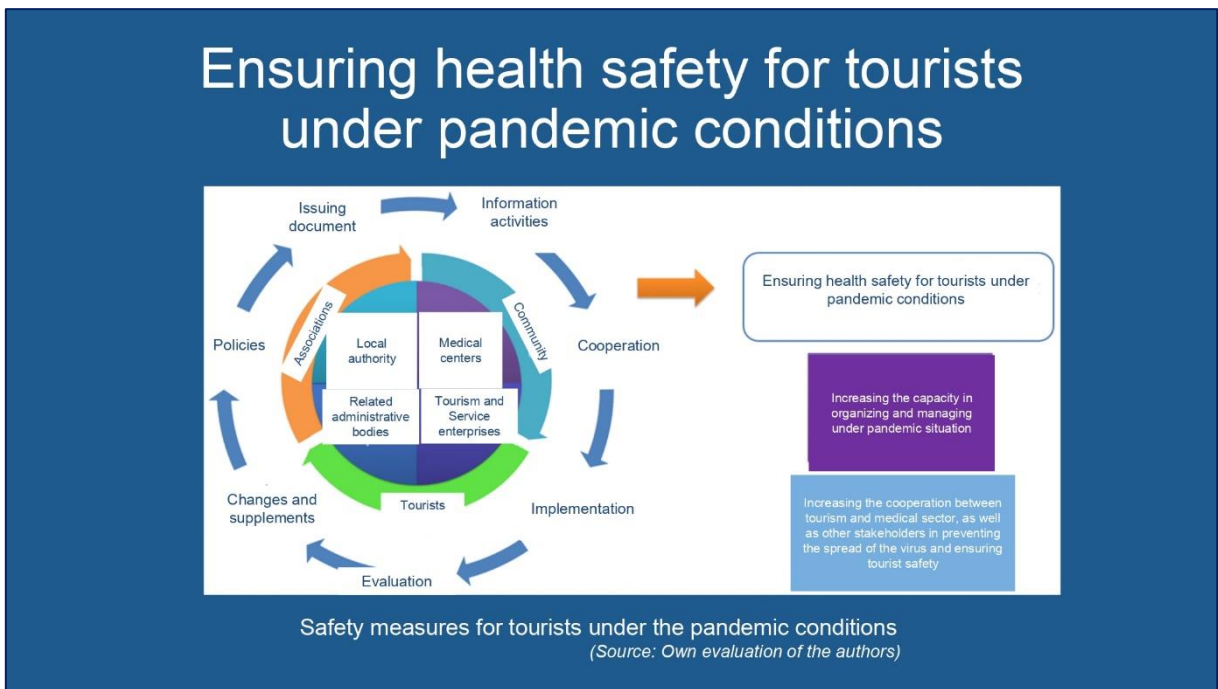
- **Authoritative bodies at the tourism destination:**
 - Ensuring safe political, security, economic, social, and environmental conditions
 - Issuing policies and mechanisms to develop tourism and ensuring the safety for tourists
 - Developing regulations and standard to administrate and monitor tourism and service enterprises.
- **Authoritative bodies at tourists' residential area**
 - Supporting tourists in accessing safe destination
 - Developing policies and regulations to protect and support tourists when leaving the residential area
- **Tourism/service enterprises:**
 - Must not violating the contract signed with tourists
 - Meeting the tourist demands. Eliminating potential risks and life-threatening situations that can harm tourists, protecting the physical/mental health, assets and financial stability of tourists.
- **Tourists:** Preparing the resources needed to ensure their basic physical and mental needs are met during the trip



Ensuring safety for tourists under pandemic conditions

Definition:
Ensuring health safety for tourists under pandemic conditions is defined as creating particular conditions and meeting their demands, in order to ensure the maximum/full elimination of potential risks and damages to tourists, avoid negative impacts on the physical, mental and financial health of tourists.

-  Tourists participate in activities when the epidemic situation is stable and under control (in Stages 1 - 4, and the post-pandemic phase)
-  In case of sudden and strong outbreaks of the epidemic (in Stage 5-6; or post-pandemic-peaks, with high risks of having another significant spread)
-  Tourists are having medical isolation (in all stages)
-  Tourists are infected with COVID-19 (in all stages)





Tourism industry

Source: General Statistic Office

Tăng trưởng khách quốc tế đến Việt Nam theo tháng năm 2019-2021

- International arrival to Viet Nam decreased 78.7% year on year, gained only 3.8 million arrivals, with more than 96% arrived from the First Quarter of 2020; from the Second Quarter to now, most of the arrivals are foreign experts and workers.
- Domestic travel is still operating but has been continuously disrupted by social distancing measures during the outbreaks.
- Tourism and travel businesses were severely affected, many of which had to stop their operation; hotels were forced to close. Tourism industry had temporarily shut down.
- Tourism revenue in 2020 is estimated at only 17.9 trillion VND, 59.5% dropped, comparing to the previous year. Several areas experienced a sharp decrease in tourism revenue in 2020 including: Khanh Hoa (-85.1%); Quang Nam (-78.7%); Ho Chi Minh City (-76.7%); Da Nang (-73.3%); Ba Ria - Vung Tau (-64.3%); Binh Duong (-60.1%); Quang Binh (-58.2%); Can Tho (-55.3%); Hanoi down 48.4%; Binh Dinh (-40.1%).
- Revenue from accommodation and F&B services this year is estimated at only 510.4 trillion VND, 13% decreased, comparing to the previous year.
- In the first nine months of 2021, international visitors to Vietnam were estimated at 114.5 thousand arrivals, decreased 97% comparing to the same period last year.
- The decrease of travel and tourism demands due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, causing airfares to decrease by 20.91% over the same period last year; the price for package tour decreased by 2.69%.
- Tourism revenue in the first 8 months of 2021 was only 136,520 billion VND, decreased 26.5% comparing the same period in 2020. Some Areas experienced a sharp decrease in tourism revenue in the first 9 months of 2021, comparing to the same period of the previous year: Quang Ninh (-31.5%); Da Nang (-42%); Can Tho (-45.3%); Ha Noi (-55.4%); Hai Phong (-55.7%); Ho Chi Minh City (-56.2%); Thua Thien - Hue (-63.1%); Binh Duong (-67.8%); Quang Nam (-82.4%); Khanh Hoa (-89.5%).

The current status of ensuring tourist safety and pandemic prevention of Vietnam tourism

Guidance on disease prevention in tourism

- Raising awareness as well as unifying contents regarding COVID-19 pandemic prevention and control is one of the central and urgent tasks of the locality and unit;
- Promulgate documents directing and guiding pandemic prevention and control for the tourism industry according to regulations
- Develop appropriate mechanisms and policies to support businesses, employees and stakeholders
- Monitor and evaluate the impact of the pandemic on tourism activities and vice versa.
- Establish working groups for inspection and supervision, from which generating advice to direct the implementation of pandemic prevention methods in accordance with actual requirements.
- Participate in central, local, sectoral and inter-sectoral working groups when required;
- Carry out regular and contingent information and reporting when required and in case of any arising problem.
- Strengthen communication, propaganda and awareness-raising functions within the industry.
- Closely monitor the situation of the nCoV pandemic, directing travel companies to cancel tours and travel packages, blocking tours for groups to infected provinces/cities, rejecting welcoming tourists from pandemic areas to Vietnam.
- Manage and closely monitor the health schedule, status and movement limitation advise of visitors in the area
- Directing units to coordinate with local health entities to isolate and manage visitors when detecting suspected or infected cases.

Current Status ...

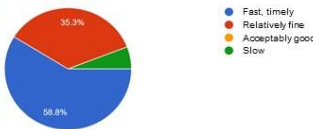


Current status...



Disseminate updated information

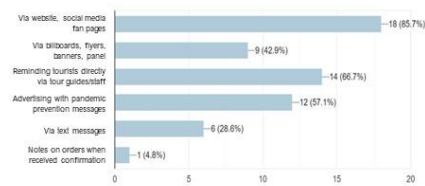
State Administration Agencies



Medical staff



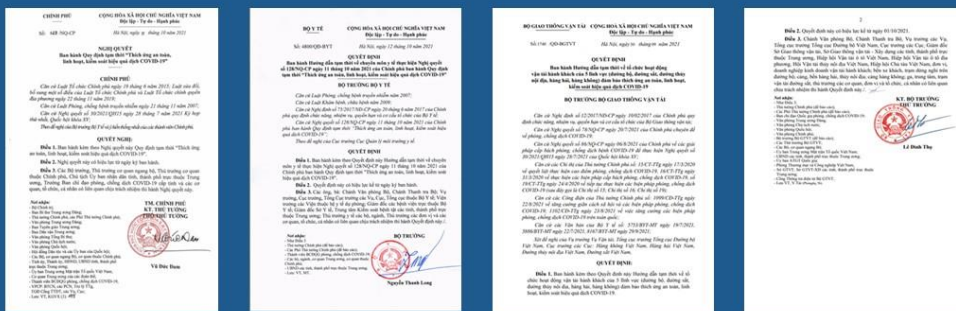
Tourism Businesses



During the COVID-19 outbreaks, tourism businesses have taken various forms to popularize and propagate to tourists about epidemic prevention measures and safe tourism: Through websites, social media (85.7%); Directly reminding visitors through the tour guides/staff (66.7%); Advertising with messages on pandemic prevention (57%).

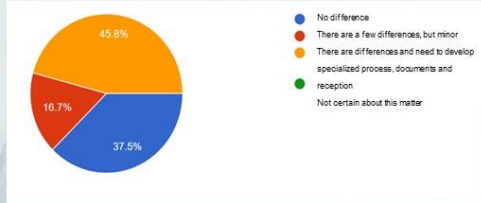
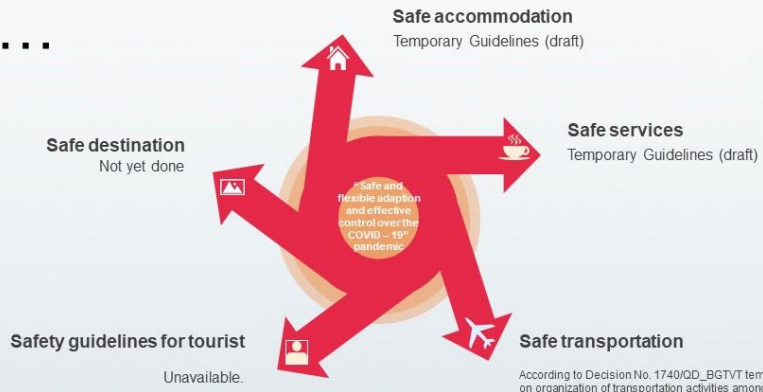
90.9% of health workers participating in the survey were informed and received regulations and instructions regarding epidemic prevention, isolation, reception, examination and treatment for tourists. Dissemination is carried out regularly (74.2%), but some localities still witness stagnancy in communication and staff have to learn and update themselves (16%).

Source: ITDR



The status...

Developing standards for medical examination and treatment for tourists

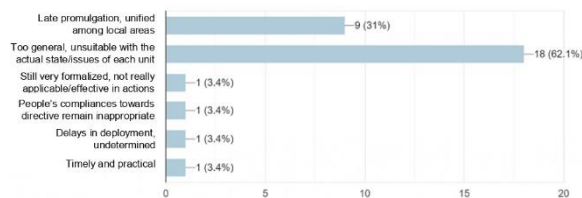


Source: ITDR

Actual status...

Policy & regulations

Vietnamese Communist Party and State agencies have identified COVID-19 pandemic prevention and control as the primary task of the whole political system, mobilizing the active and drastic participation of ministries, sectors, localities and the entire People. The prevention and control of infectious diseases is not only the responsibility of the State or any individual or organization, but also the responsibility of the whole community, which has been clearly stated in the Law on Prevention and Control of Infectious Diseases 2007.



Regulations	Guidance
Immigration; Passenger transportation; Ensure safety, prevention; Isolation, medical examination and treatment... Safe travel	Decision 473/QĐ-TCDL Guiding measures to prevent and control the COVID-19 pandemic Decision 474/QĐ/TCDL dated May 1, 2020 amending and supplementing some contents of the above Guidelines. The Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism has issued Official Letter No. 1518/BVHTTDL-TCDL requesting central and provincial People's Committees to urge the implementation of Covid-19 safety assessment of tourist accommodation establishments. Nationwide.
Technologies	Coordinating, propagating to raise awareness
safe.tourism.com.vn tokhalyte.vn, mobile apps ie. "Vietnam tourism guidelines", "Safe travel to Vietnam", "Vietnam Health Declaration", "Bluezone", "N-COVI"	Dissemination, information, situation updates, Media.
Business support	
Guaranteed safety Supporting businesses in pandemic prevention Ensure social security, support workers	

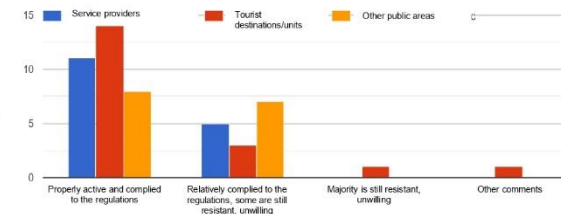
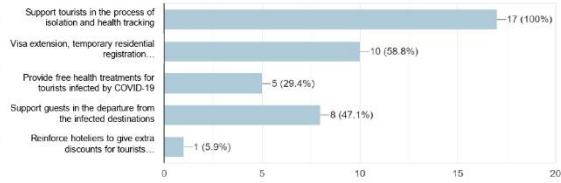
Actual status...

Procedure & guideline implementation

State management agencies

- Assessing the status of deployment and implementation of pandemic prevention and control activities, ensuring the safety of tourists in the locality: most of the units have voluntarily strictly complied with regulations, especially in tourist destinations and service units
- Action plan for pandemic prevention and tourist safety are proactively and promptly implemented thanks to proper policies and regulations.
- The local state tourism management agencies has implemented SOLUTIONS to support and ensure the tourist safety: Applying technology in pandemic prevention and case tracing (88.2%), Review the tracking of tourists at accommodation establishments (82.4%); Encourage accommodation facilities to register as isolation areas (76.5%) and propagate pandemic prevention (70%).

Supportive policies to ensure the safety of local tourists

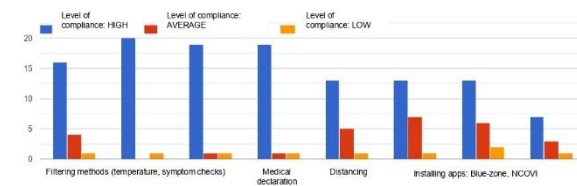


Actual status...

Procedure & guideline implementation

Businesses

- Doanh nghiệp du lịch đánh giá về việc chấp hành những quy định và biện pháp phòng dịch được nhà nước khuyến cáo của KHÁCH DU LỊCH: Mức độ tuân thủ tốt
- Proper compliance with pandemic prevention actions and regulations recommended by the state of CORPORATE OFFICERS: the level of compliance with regulations is well done.
- Travel businesses evaluate compliance with pandemic prevention actions and regulations recommended by the state of TRAVELERS: Good level of compliance



Health personnel

The implementation of procedures and instructions on ensuring pandemic prevention, especially for tourists, still face difficulties such as: Complicated process of information collection, contact tracing and movement history of tourists (62.5%); Large workload and pressure, limited medical human resources (56.3%); The coordination between stakeholders and health facilities is still weak (40.6%). In particular, some commented that there was still a lack of cooperation and compliance with regulations of residents and tourists (37.5%) while there exists complicated medical examination and treatment procedures for foreign tourists (34.4%).



Exposure and movement tracking



Workload pressures and limitations of health and medical human resources



Coordinate with health units

Actual status...

Medical supports for local units

During the each COVID-19 outbreaks, the coordination between units and the tourism industry showed a number of shortcomings as follows:



Formulating regulations and guidelines

Inadequate

Safety procedures

Unified

Trainings for pandemic prevention in tourism

Spontaneous depending on the unit, locality

Medical examination and treatment procedures

Improper and unstandardized regarding international criteria

Urgent situation handling

Existing confusions and uncertainties

Insurance

Implement according to the international and national benchmarks

Overall assessment

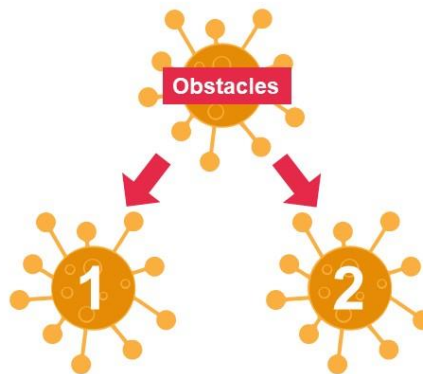
- The implementation of disease prevention and control, ensuring tourist safety has been organized in accordance with the direction of the Central and local authorities;
- In the response towards the pandemic, the capacity building of the whole sector has been improved, especially in the following areas: propaganda and communication, timely response to arising issues, ensuring social security for the affected population, with relevant stakeholders, especially the support for tourists, recommending the policies to support service and tourism businesses.
- Organize the management, review and implementation of pandemic prevention and control techniques for each category (suspected of being infected, at risk of getting infected, etc.)
- Coordinate with functional agencies and departments to ensure the tourist safety (life and property) during the outbreaks.
- Pandemic precautions in tourism have been implemented and managed appropriately, minimizing possible risks
- Timely deploying the inspection and supervision of the pandemic prevention and control, monitoring and urging the progress.

COVID-19

Difficulties, obstacles, limitations

Difficulties

- ✓ Currently, there are too many applications that must be deployed such as safe.tourism.com.vn, tokhaiyte.vn, "Vietnam travel guide", "Vietnam safe travel", "Vietnamese health declaration" Nam, "Bluezone", "N-COVI", which are unfavorable to access and use
- ✓ Untimely communication between locality and agencies. Stagnantly unified deployment and collaboration between different destinations.
- ✓ Lacking specialized benchmarks, regulations for tourist safety.
- ✓ Tourism businesses are extremely financially struggling.



Limitations

- ✓ Presenting and comprehension of pandemic prevention as well as tourist safety directives and guidelines are unlikely
- ✓ The development of pandemic prevention plan/procedures and ensuring tourist safety is still a formality.
- ✓ The online medical declaration and QR code listing at some facilities have not yet complied with the requirements.
- ✓ On safe.tourism.com.vn, The self-assessment for COVID-19 safety is not done regularly.
- ✓ Registration for SARS-CoV-2 test (sample gathering) for staff who directly come into interactions with tourists at the accommodation facilities is still improper due to limited fundings for testing among units as well as vaccinating for staff.
- ✓ Limited medical and travel knowledge



***Recommendations
to strengthen the
tourist safety
during COVID-19
outbreaks***

Recommendations

Reframe/Construct Policy, mechanism and regulations	Identify safe destinations and secure service chains
	Develop standards and criteria for safe tourism
	Support business recovery and development
	Certify Safe travel and tourism certificates; the safety process of welcoming and serving international tourists
Enhance awareness and capability	Database and monitoring system for safe Vietnam tourism
	Strengthen and build trust, knowledge, skills
	Organize trainings and education
Collaborate, coordinate between stakeholders	Propaganda, information and communication. Provide timely and accurate information, forecasts and directions
	Develop coordinating mechanisms and policies
	Identify stakeholders, functions and tasks
	Construct action plan
Build safe tourism business model	Form inter-sectoral and inter-regional forces
	Ensure safe products, safe services and safe travel activities
	Ensure the quality of product, human resources and supportive activities
Foster safe tourism markets	build plans/alternatives and handling methods in pandemic prevention and control to ensure tourist safety
	Refer to https://www.unwto.org/unwto-iata-destination-tracker for more information about issues regarding safety levels of inbound tourist markets
	Select potential markets (Vaccine passport) for domestic and inbound
	Implement promotional activities to attract the markets in the compatible and appropriate condition



COVID-19 IMPACTS ON THE TOURISM INDUSTRY AND EXPERIENCE TO ENSURE TOURIST SAFETY DURING A PANDEMIC

Phung Quang Thang - Director of Hanoitourist Travel Company

I. Covid-19 impacts on the tourism industry

Since the beginning of 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic has severely influenced global tourism in general and Vietnam tourism in particular. The pandemic has ended the chain of tourism average growth (nearly 23% per year) in international arrivals between 2015-2019. In 2020, due to the COVID-19 impacts, compared to 2019, the country only welcomed 3.7 million international visitors, declining by 80%; 56 million domestic visitors, meaning a drop of 34.1%, and hit a 58.7% down for total tourism revenue. In the first 9 months of 2021, domestic tourists continued to fall by 16% over the same period in 2020, reaching 31.5 million visitors; thus, total tourism revenue decreased by 41%. (According to the Vietnam National Administration of Tourism).

The pandemic has directly affected the operating results of multiple tourism parties, such as:

- Most of the tourist spots are empty, those used to mainly welcome international tourists now have to temporarily switch to domestic markets, however, the number of visitors also dropped sharply. Tourism activities were shut down many times to prevent the spread of COVID-19.

- The revenue of the tourism business saw a significant downward trend; for months, there was even no revenue gained, creating difficulties to cover the operating expenses. Many businesses have closed or suspended their operations, only a few entities are operating or operating in moderation.

- Workers lose their jobs, many people temporarily seek other jobs or completely change to other occupations. Tourism graduates are also unable to acquire jobs during the severe impact of the pandemic.

- After each outbreak, businesses try to restore operations immediately, nonetheless, after a while, the circulation of closing took place again as of pandemic prevention procedures. This circumstance exhausted the resources of most businesses, in terms of the budget, labor force, and unstable tourist markets during the pandemic period.

II. Experience to ensure tourist safety during a pandemic

To ensure tourist safety during pandemic waves, it is essential to take steps to strengthen the safety of the tourism workforce, businesses, suppliers, and the local community participating in tourism activities.

1. Ensuring safety for tourism workers

1.1. Zoning for adaptive behaviors

- Nationwide: comply with the general regulations of the Government, the Ministry of Health, and relevant authorities

- Locality (province/city): furthermore, comply with local government regulations

- Workplaces: comply with general rules and regulations of the workplace

- At home: take actions according to local regulations (wards, neighborhood groups)

- In public places: comply with the regulations of the local government and the local authorities

1.2. Disseminate and improve workers' understanding of the pandemic

- Assign responsibility to the leaders in charge of ensuring safety and prevention of pandemic at the working units, deploying among different departments.

- Guidance on health regulations, local authorities, authorities in charge where the enterprise is located.

- Establish and provide guidelines for the process and organize safety procedures against COVID-19 for different teams in the business unit.

1.3. Organize pandemic prevention practices for employees

- Instruct employees to strictly comply with regulations on pandemic prevention and control strategies of health authorities, local authorities, and businesses.

- Fully engage employees to the propaganda.

- Ensure that employees participate in propaganda events and implement regulations on pandemic prevention for citizens living in the same house.

- Monitor the executions related to the above instructions such as preparing pandemic prevention equipment, technical procedures, compliance with safety guidelines, updating information about the pandemic, etc. Specifically:

- + Physical exposure

- + Infection control
- + Using tools and equipment
- + Safety wears, protectives, gloves, masks
- + Food and beverages supplies

- Assess the risks and possible threats caused by the pandemic that may affect the health of workers and enterprise's operation to take timely measures for the pandemic prevention and control.

- During the uncertain times of the pandemic, Covid-19 safety teams implement daily reports on the health of workers, verifying that they and their family members are symptom-free.

- Educate and train employees, directly and indirectly, involved in serving tourists on regulations and situations that may arise in the process of organizing tourism activities.

2. Ensure the safety of tourists

2.1. Propagating actions of COVID-19 prevention

- Guidelines for tourists to fully grasp contents related to pandemic prevention procedures in the local destination and tourism service providers.

- Apply online communication tools to ascertain that tourists were comprehensively notified about accurate and up-to-date information.

2.2. Organize the process to ensure safety for tourists

- Investigate travelers' epidemiological factors before picking up and serving, confirming that guests do not come from high-risk areas within 14 days, necessary cases require a negative test for Sars -CoV-2.

- Depending on the nature of each outbreak, specific regulations for guests participating in tourism programs need to be promulgated, for example, tourists are obliged to be fully vaccinated when tourism activities are restored after the 4th wave.

- Check the pandemic prevention progress at the operating service units during the implementation of the tourism program. For example, in-charge employees must be fully vaccinated, presenting medical examination and negative test results for Sars-Cov-2, while service equipment must be sanitized according to pandemic prevention regulations, etc.

- Anticipating contingent situations according to the characteristics of each tourist route and location to provide techniques and training for tour guides in cases of abnormal pandemic occurrence to handle risks promptly, timely, and correctly.

- Develop a plan to organize a safe tourism program based on the foundation of pandemic prevention.

- Depending on the pandemic situation to determine the characteristics of tourism in the form of closed or open tourism. For example, for the time being, only closed tourism is applicable.

- Develop the process and monitor the level of safety in the implementation of COVID-19 prevention, parallel to the during the deployment of the tourism program.

- Closely keep track of and control employees of service enterprises and units in the tourism supply chain on their compliance with pandemic preventing regulations. Indirectly investigate through employees and leaders/managers of service entities to monitor the compliance of tourists.

- For Vietnamese tourists, tour operators will monitor their health status within 14 days after the trip.

3. Key general rules

General, important regulations that workers and tourists need to comprehend, understand and implement, are as follows:

- Strictly follow the 5K regulations promulgated by the health authorities (Masks, Disinfection, Distance, No gathering in large numbers, and Medical Declaration). Tourists should be educated that, even though they have been injected with full doses of the Covid-19 vaccine, the possibility of infection and contagiousness still exists, thus complying with the 5K and other regulations are the responsibilities of service providers and tourists in the restoring process of tourism.

- Arrange distancing system according to regulations in the workplaces and service points to limit close interactions among tourists. Adopt required equipment and tools to strengthen the safety such as hand sanitizer, temperature measurement, masks, protective clothing, and other primary tools.

- Comply with regulations on the capacity of guest service locations during the pandemic prevention period.

- Strictly comply with regulations on hygiene and disinfection, and limit the risk of surface contact. Set up a waste treatment process if in case that Sars-CoV-2 infection occurs at the unit.

- Travel service providers are requested to develop a hotline to instruct and provide assistance to customers for pandemic prevention.

- Applying technology to facilitate the motto of "Touchless tourism" such as contactless payment, non-touch service booking, etc.

4. Method of organization and implementation

- Develop a set of criteria for safe tourism, applicable to businesses, tourism service providers, tourist attractions, staff, and tourists.

- The set of criteria should refer to the regulations of the health authorities and other governments.

- The set of criteria is built into 3 levels: (1) central, (2) local (province/city), (3) enterprise/service provider. Level (1) includes general criteria, level (2) moreover includes criteria suitable to the conditions of each locality, province/city, level (3) includes further criteria for enterprises/service units. suitable for tourism products and services of their units.

- Based on the set of criteria, the bottom-line implementers (businesses, workers, and tourists) can easily, flexibly, and adapt to actual conditions.

- Having a set of criteria will foster the control and monitoring mechanism of the level of safety and risk in the process of organizing tourism activities.

- Design set of criteria to easily introduce pandemic prevention activities, ensure safety for workers, tourists, and local communities./.

CHALLENGES IN ENSURING TOURIST SAFETY DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC IN VIETNAM

M.A Hoang Dao Cam - Institute for Tourism Development Research

Tourism is increasingly considered a necessity for human wellbeing. Travelling serves the demand for relaxation, exploration, learning, cultural exchange, or just simply brings changes of atmosphere, rhythm, and environment of life.

Until 2019, tourism in the world and Vietnam was probably one of the few economic sectors that always maintained its positive and stable rise. However, the covid-19 outbreaks have brought an unprecedented crisis to the tourism industry since 2020. If the SARS epidemic in 2003 only reduced tourism growth by 0.4%, the economic crisis in 2009 caused a decrease of 4%, then Covid-19 diminish a proportion of 73.9%. The decline in the Asia-Pacific region was even higher, which hit up to 84%.

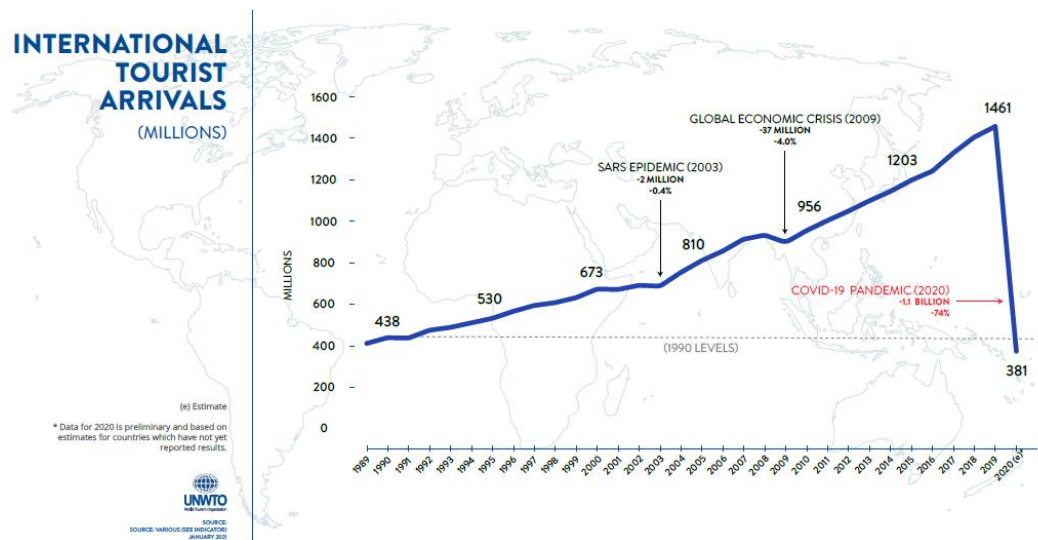


Figure 1. International visitor statistics 1989-2020

Source: UN-WTO

Statistics show that in 2020, international tourism has returned to the level of the early 1990s, equal to a period of 30 years backward. Among different regions around the world, the Asia-Pacific region, which was previously the fastest-growing area, is witnessing the most detrimental influence from the pandemic with a recorded decline of nearly 84%.

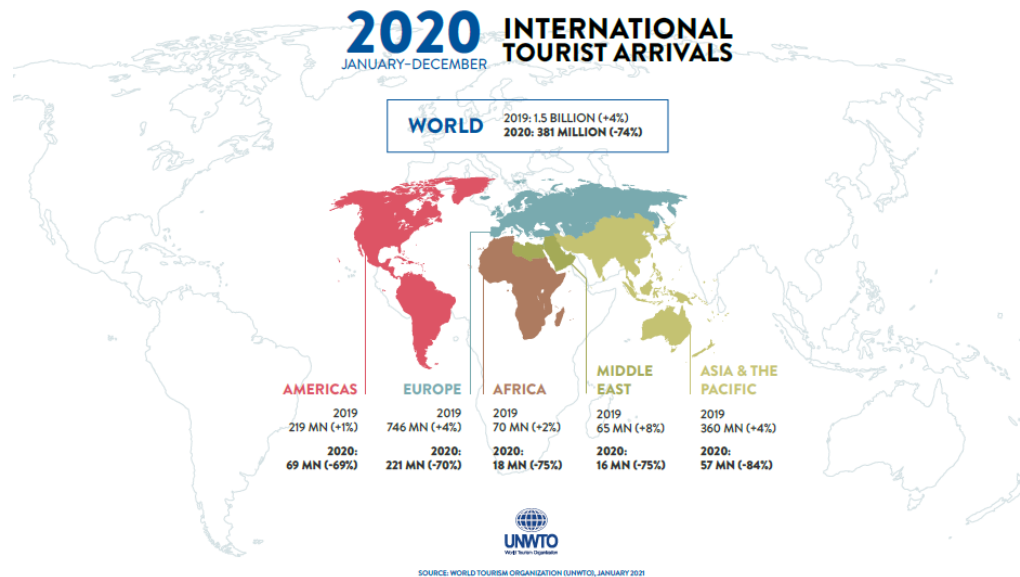


Figure 2. International visitor arrivals by region in 2019 and 2020 (Source: UN-WTO)

A recent study by UNTAC and UNWTO (United Nations' World Tourism Organization) estimates that, in 2021, global GDP could lose an amount of between \$2.4 trillion (under the worst-case scenario) and 1.8 thousand billion USD (under the most optimistic situation). In addition, Southeast Asia's GDP would undergo a loss of 6 to 9.3% due to the severe drop in tourism. In this sense, experts predict that international tourism may only regain its pre-epidemic status earliest by the end of 2023. One of the most important reasons cited was the uneven distribution of vaccines, which has led to strict travel restrictions and the emergence of new strains of the virus globally. The heaviest-influenced regions are Northeast Asia, Southeast Asia, Oceania, North Africa, and South Asia, while the least affected are situated in North America, Western Europe, and the Caribbean.

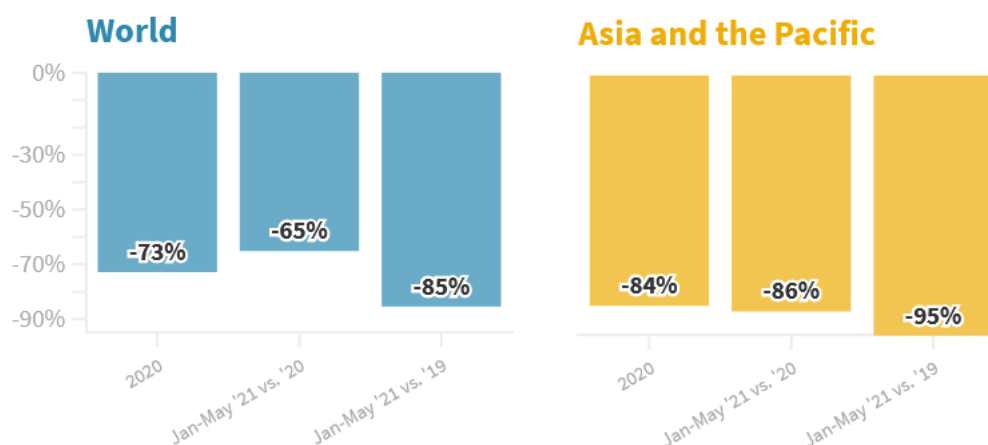


Figure 3. Decline in international tourism in the world and the Asia Pacific in 2020 and the first half of 2021 (Source: UN-WTO)

At the same time, the drop from other relevant industries resulted in an estimated \$4.5 trillion in revenue loss globally. Tourism's share in global GDP fell from 10.4% to 5.5%. In 2020, the global tourism workforce saw a decrease of 62

million workers, which was remarkable because from 2014 to 2019, the tourism industry created 1/4 of the number of new jobs worldwide.

In Vietnam, although there has not been a complete and comprehensive assessment of the Covid-19 pandemic, the tourism industry is experiencing a distressing crisis on a global scale. After four outbreaks in several localities across the country, Vietnam tourism has suffered from enormously adverse impacts. In 2020, the whole country only accounted for 3.8 million international visitors (since international tourists were only welcomed in the first 3 months of the year), while the figure for domestic tourists reduced about 50%, resulting in an approximate loss of 530 trillion VND. The heavy impact from COVID-19 could be recognized in every branch of the entire system: namely accommodation, travel companies, food, and beverage, shopping establishments and especially the tourism workforce, both directly and indirectly.

In the first 6 months of 2021, Vietnam has not yet opened its doors to international visitors. During this period, the number of domestic tourists is projected to reach 30.5 million (of which there were only 15.8 million visitors using accommodation services). The industry is, therefore, anticipated to gain an amount of 134 trillion VND, decreasing by 24.2% compared to the same period in 2020. In the following months, under the serious outbreak affecting most provinces and cities, tourism businesses and services are mostly shut down or operated to a very limited extent.

According to WTTC's assessment:

In 2019, the Asia-Pacific region was the fastest developing tourism region globally with a growth of 7.4% in terms of tourism GDP. This outcome was achieved due to the development of the middle-income market, open visa policy, investment efforts to develop infrastructure, facilities as well as encouraging and preferential policies of governments.

In 2020, as of travel restrictions related to COVID-19, the region recorded the lowest ranking globally, in which the data for tourism GDP plummeted by 53.7%. Simultaneously, the revenue earned from inbound tourists decreased by 74.4%, but for the domestic market, the number showed a lower decline of about 48.1%.

Within the region itself, the tourism workforce noted a loss of 34 million workers (18.4%). However, the rate of decline is also uneven across the region: whilst South Asia recorded a decline of 36.5%, Northeast Asia's decrease was up to 56.4%.

The fall in spending of domestic tourists in the Asia - Pacific region was lower than the average of the world (45%); in detailed: Thailand (-28%), Vietnam

(-28.2%), Japan (-30.3%), New Zealand (-0.4%), India (-30.7%), Malaysia (-32.7%), Korea (-34%), Indonesia (-35.2%), Philippines (-35.5%) and Singapore (-36.1%).

In many countries, supportive government policies have encouraged people to travel within the country. For example, the Thai Government announced three subsidiary packages for domestic tourism with a total of over 700 million USD. These packages include accommodation services, meals, sightseeing, and air tickets, allowing tourists to pay as much as 60% of the original costs for such categories. Likewise, health and medical staff receive a discount of 65 USD for booking their trips through travel agencies. In addition, TAT also launched the 'Amazing Thailand Grand Sale 2020 - Non-Stop Shopping' program lasting 2 months with attractive promotions for air tickets, transportation, and accommodation.

International Tourism Recovery Scenarios (by UNWTO):

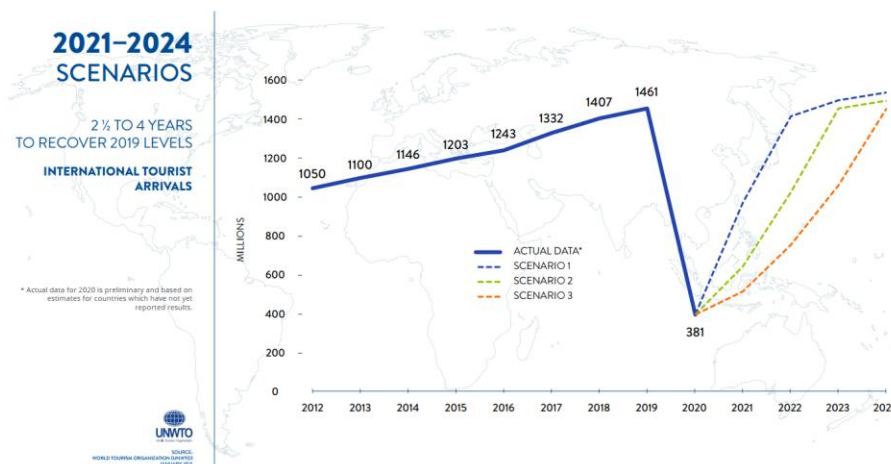


Figure 4. Three UN-WTO recovery scenarios (built in December 2020) (Source: UN-WTO)

Despite several reported predictions about Asia-Pacific tourism, the recovery could not be feasible in 2021 because of many different factors, which majorly lie in the slow progress of vaccination and the appearance of new virus variants – the super infectious.

Interviews with experts conducted by UN-WTO on the recovery of tourism also did not show optimism: specifically for Asia-Pacific tourism, up to 56% of the respondents said that the return to pre-pandemic 2019 levels can only be reached by 2024 or later.

When do you expect international tourism to return to pre-pandemic 2019 levels in your country?

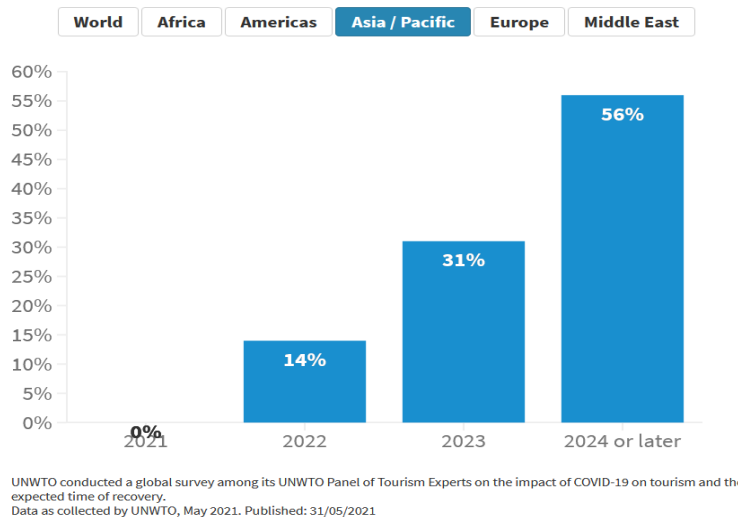


Figure 5. Interview results on the recovery of international tourism in the Asia-Pacific region (Source: UN-WTO)

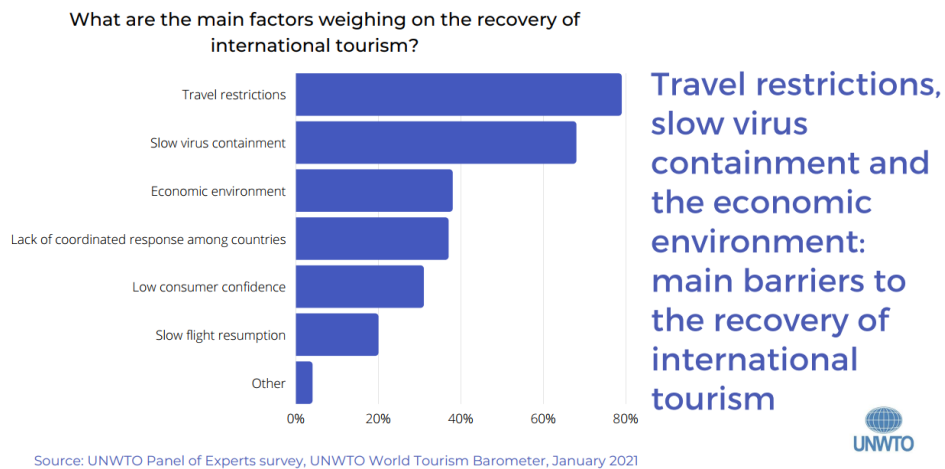


Figure 6. Interview results of the UN-WTO Advisory Council on factors affecting the recovery of international tourism (Source: UN-WTO)

The figure above illustrates that travel restrictions hold the largest influence on the recovery of international tourism (so far, 53% of the countries in the Asia-Pacific region have not opened their borders for international travel). The second factor is the stagnancy in pandemic control plan and the emergence of new variants; followed by the economic environment containing the lack of coordination and harmony in response policies among countries; low consumer confidence and delayed recovery of international flight routes.

Challenges to ensuring tourist safety need to be analyzed by each stakeholder/party to generate an integrated assessment, from which a comprehensive, complete, and effective solution system can be developed.

From the perspective of the government and state agencies, these challenges derive from the formulation of a unified and effective policy system to ensure the

smooth operation of the tourism value chain while properly managing the safety and health status of tourists, service providers, communities, and other stakeholders. The policy system includes regulations on pandemic prevention, regulations on administrative procedures, immigration, regulations on travel, policies on the development of the medical and healthcare system. One of the essential policies in the short term is the open-door policy for both domestic and foreign tourists, regarding the degree of openness, specific available areas, etc., and related regulations. Parallely, there needs to be a consistent policy system from the central to local levels, between localities, ministries, and sectors. Allocating adequate resources to implement policies is another key to qualifying policy implementation. The concept of "safe movements, green movements" will need to be gradually improved and expanded to the target groups.

The healthcare and medical system is critically required to be constructed and well-prepared to meet the need of not only local citizens, but also tourists. In which, the development of private healthcare organizations plays a very important role in tourism. Creating a variety of crisis scenarios and risk management processes for the health system would be primary to scrupulously prepare for different cases. Along with the advancement of the health system, close attention has to be paid to the issue of travel insurance to diminish possible risks and cater sufficient resources to handle large-scale crises.

Service points and service providers need to carry out a multi-dimensional evaluation of risks and negative probabilities to tourist safety according to each risk group: risk of injury, food hygiene, and safety, the risk of infectious diseases; risk of illness. Preparing for these challenges requires a complete mechanism of regulations, standards, and standards, with specialized elements to each region and specific case. Establishing procedures and ensuring correct execution is vital to the quality of products and services, as well as the safety of both visitors and staff. In addition, tourist service providers have to install appropriate first aid equipment, followed by staff, who is necessitated to be equipped with basic knowledge of first aid, ensuring medical safety.

For the community, hygiene verification is the most crucial factor, along with raising awareness and responsibilities about safety and health for tourists as well as the community itself.

Securing tourist safety has been taken as one of the most important conditions to build and strengthen the image and reputation of the destination, improve competitiveness and bring about effective operation, minimizing risks, accidents, and breakdowns for the tourism industry. Some specific methods that can be considered to ensure tourist safety are suggested as follows:

Tourist safety protection includes: physical, mental, illness, and property guarantees. In the context of the covid pandemic, the matters of ensuring health and mental safety will especially be concerned.

Set up and apply a system of standards and procedures to secure visitor safety at the destination: in the past, the standard system and processes often focused on food safety and hygiene, environmental sanitation, insect control measures, however, to deal with the SARS-CoV-2 virus and its new strains, traditional measures are inadequate. Therefore, it is necessary to research and reinforce an additional system of appropriate standards and processes, including standards on hygiene, environment, constructions, service catering processes, business operation processes, and regulations to traffics and transportation, etc.

Safe host communities and service providers: Another importance to ensure the hygiene and health of visitors is ascertaining that the host community and service providers are not sources of infection to tourists. To achieve this, in the current period, apart from the awareness of hygiene and disease prevention, it is pivotal that every individual in the host community and the tourism service supply chain is healthy and fully vaccinated.

Healthcare system: limited budgets and great pressure on the healthcare system reflect that the demand for healthcare for tourism development could not be satisfied. This is a problem that needs to be researched, evaluated, and solved systematically, from the aspects of legal, policy, investment, awareness-raising...

Health and travel insurance: Travel insurance is a prudent step in protecting tourists and tourism service providers against risks in tourism activities, reasoning why it should be strongly encouraged.

Traveler's health status: priorly, a certificate of vaccination was only a mandatory document for some destinations in Africa, but perhaps shortly, the "covid" passport will be compulsory for travel and tourism. Regulations on "covid" passports will need to be unified between countries to acquire convenience, security and create ideal conditions for both visitors and destinations.

Risk management plan: Risky situations certainly call for careful preparations. The development of a risk management plan and a risk treatment process is essential to proactively respond to adverse and urgent cases of natural disasters, accidents, epidemics, etc. The plan can be built based on different layers of authority following their actual requirements and management capacity. However, one of the notable issues is the proper assessment of risks to deliver the most appropriate treatments to ensure security and safety for tourists and local people, while not missing opportunities or wasting resources unnecessarily.

Recently, Resolution 128/NQ-CP dated October 11, 2021, of the Government, promulgating temporary regulations on "Flexible adaptation, safety, and effective control of the Covid-19 epidemic" is a fundamental milestone in bridging the country to the "new normal" phase with the restoration of socio-economic activities, including tourism under a unified framework across the country. This is the restart of tourism activities that have stalled in the past after the epidemic showed signs of being controlled, and the Covid-19 vaccination was deployed quickly and effectively across the country./.

MEASURES AND POLICIES TO ENSURE THE SECURITY FOR TOURISTS UNDER PANDEMIC CONDITIONS – CURRENT ISSUES AND SOLUTIONS

M.A Le Minh Que - Travel Department, Vietnam National Administration of Tourism

I. Introduction

Since 2020, the COVID-19 outbreaks have resulted in a major crisis for the tourism industry. According to UNWTO, due to the impact of the pandemic, global tourism has shifted back to the level of development of 30 years ago. UNWTO also estimates that it would take from 2.5 to 4 years for the sector to regain the level of growth like in 2019. OEDC states that tourism would be the last industry of the economic sector to recover after the full control of COVID-19 outbreaks.

For tourism in Vietnam, the industry is being heavily damaged. All growth rates of the industry witnessed a significant downturn in 2020: international visitor rate only reached 3.7 million, 80% decreased compared to 2019; domestic visitor rate was 56 million, 34.1% decreased compared to 2019; total revenue in 2020 was at 312,200 billion VND, witnessed a 58.7% downturn compared to the last year. Moving to 2021, Vietnam welcomed 31.5 million domestic tourists (16% decreased) and earned 312,200 billion VND (42% decreased) in terms of tourism revenue. Currently, 30% of the total travel enterprises have been deactivated, thus only 2,000 companies are still holding their business license, but a majority of them are temporally shut down. 90% of the accommodation businesses are closing due to the lack of customers, except those are opening as isolation centers.

WHO estimates that fully controlling the COVID-19 pandemic before 2023 would not be a feasible task, with a high potential of having new dangerous variants, making the situation more complicated and less predictable. However, strong progress in terms of vaccination, plus the presence of new pharmaceutical treatments can help to decrease the number of serious cases, death rates, and infection rates. Following the current situation, most of the countries have switched from the “Zero-COVID” strategy to safe operation under the COVID-19 conditions. For Vietnam, the capacity for effective responses of the health system has been leveraged. Along with the progress in terms of vaccination for groups with high infection rates and urban citizens, the country is becoming more active in tackling the pandemic.

The tourism sector is now facing the challenge of both maintaining the safety condition to prevent the contagion of coronavirus and effectively restarting tourism activities; increasing the demand for tourism; pushing the sector development under the new normal. Thus, ensuring health security at tourism

accommodations and tourism service operators is crucial, to protect the visitors when participating in tourism activities.

II. Proposed safety measures to protect tourists under pandemic conditions

1. General direction from Vietnamese Government in safety ensuring under COVID-19 condition

Right from the moment, the COVID-19 pandemic started to spread out around the globe (in 2020), the Prime Minister had quickly responded by issuing the Directive 19/CT-TTg on April 24th, 2020 (A new stage of prevention and control of COVID-19). The Directive stated that Ministries, ministerial agencies, governmental agencies, the People's Committees of provinces shall adhere to the duty of guiding safety measures and guaranteeing security at establishments and while doing activities related to the management scope of the agency.

In 2021, the Government issued a series of directives on maintaining safety conditions and implementing measures to prevent the spread of the virus, including Resolution No. 63/NQ-CP dated June 29th, 2021 on key tasks and solutions to promote economic growth, disbursement of public investment and sustaining export activities in the last months of 2021 and early 2022. According to the Resolution, the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism is in charge of building and issuing policies on increasing tourism demands, recovering travel and tourism activities. Also, cooperation with other related administrative bodies is stated as vital.

On October 11th, 2021, the Government issued Resolution No. 128/NQ-CP dated October 11, 2021, on promulgating the Interim Regulation on "safe and flexible adaptation and effective control over the COVID-19 pandemic". According to the Resolution, the COVID-19 pandemic is divided into multiple levels: Level 1: low contagion risk (new-normal), labelled as "green"; Level 2: medium contagion risk, labelled as "yellow"; Level 3: high contagion risk, labelled as "orange" and Level 4: extremely high contagion risk, labelled as "red". These labels are applied to the geographical level of the commune. The evaluation criteria include the rate of new cases at the community/total number of citizens/times, vaccine coverage, and the ability to obtain and provide treatments. The Ministry of Health is responsible for guiding local authorities and related administrative bodies on evaluation criteria and methodologies for determining the contagion level. Based on the instruction of the Ministry of Health, the provincial-level People's Committees will identify the level of contagion within the area. In case of any changes in the contagion level, an official announcement must be issued at least 48 hours before switching to the other level, to support the preparation of local citizens, agencies, and business enterprises for the new conditions.

On 14th October 2021, the Ministry of Health issued Decision no 4800/QĐ-BYT: Issuing the Interim Guidance for implementation of the Government's Resolution No. 128/NQ-CP dated October 11, 2021, promulgating the Interim Regulation on "safe and flexible adaptation and effective control over the COVID-19 pandemic". According to the decision, criteria for evaluating the level of contagion risk and specialized measures have been specified.

2. Safety measures for the Vietnamese tourism sector

a. Building a system for the safety registration and safety evaluation under COVID-19 condition of accommodation businesses and tourism enterprises at <https://safe.tourism.com.vn>. On September 21st, 2021, 63/63 provinces with 13,792 enterprises (with 12,943 from the accommodation sector; 849 from the travel sector, and 1.146 are temporally deactivated) has registered to the system.

b. Executing Plan no. 3228/KH-BVHTTDL, issued September 7th, 2021 for implementing measures on boosting tourism demand and restarting tourism and travel activities.

The plan includes the regulations on ensuring the safety for destinations and tourists:

- + Prioritizing fast and effective vaccination for locals and the labour force at core tourism destinations, gradually expanding the progress across the nation

- + Implementing safety measures for destinations, tourism service providers; enhancing the capacity of the preventive health system and controlling the COVID-19 contagion; ensuring the effective implementation of 5K regulation.

- + Providing supportive conditions in travelling for domestic and international tourists with vaccine certification that match the international standard system.

- + Pilot testing on safe international tourist destination at Phu Quoc (Kien Giang). Based on this foundation, expanding the model across the nations: implementing at Ha Long (Quang Ninh), Hoi An (Quang Nam), Nha Trang (Khanh Hoa), Da Lat (Lam Dong).

c. Implementing safety instruction at tourism zone, destination, accommodation centres, tourism enterprises following Decision no. 473 /QĐ-TCDL, issued 29/4/2020, and Decision no. 474/QĐ/TCDL (updated version) issued 01/5/2020.

Following the issued instruction with Decision 473/QĐ-TCDL, tourism enterprises, tourism zone, destination, accommodation centres and tourism service providers; tourists, accommodation guests and tourism service users; officers, tour guides, workers at travel enterprises, at tourism zone, at destinations,

at accommodation centres and tourism service providers, etc. must strictly follow the safety measures under COVID-19 conditions. Ensuring health security, avoiding cross-infection, virus spreading to tourists, service users; officers, tour guides, contact people and the community. Providing high-quality service for tourists and service customers.

For tourism enterprises, tourism zone, destinations, accommodation centres and tourism service providers, officers, tour guides, and workers, the safety measures must be carefully instructed. Posters for safety instruction must be placed in reception areas, public areas, service areas and guest bedrooms for accommodation centres. Organizing the reception areas, entrances and routes following the social distancing regulations of the Ministry of Health. Measuring body temperature for all service users, contact people, suppliers; Providing masks to customers when needed.

Tourism enterprises must only organize tourism services in case the social distancing regulations are being met. For F&B service at accommodation centres, in the case cannot ensure meeting social distancing requirements, must apply serving customers at guest bedrooms. Do not allow guests to sleep in large groups within one room. Creating a medical record book for each officer, guide and employee. Measuring the body temperature of all employees upon arrival at the workplace. Employees showing signs of flu, cough, fever or arrived from an epidemic area, must not go to work and must monitor their health at home. Officers, tour guides, workers must wear a mask; keep their distance when contact; regularly wash their hands. For accommodation centres, all employees from the room service department must wear gloves when making the room and serving the guests.

Under the request of the Vietnam National Administration of Tourism, tourists and service users and contact people at tourism service centres must implement the safety measures following the instruction of health centres; follow the arrangement of tourism service providers in ensuring safe social distancing.

Except when at the guest bedroom, when eating/drinking at bars and restaurants, guests must always wear a mask. Do not share personal items such as cups, water bottles, towels..., regularly wash their hands properly. Keeping a supportive manner when working with the authorities and tourism service providers. Guests must inform the local authority when experiencing any COVID-19 symptoms after leaving the tourism service centres.

Some contents in the Instruction have been updated, added following Decision no. 474/QĐ-TCDL. Point h, Clause 1, Article 4 has been updated to "Creating a medical record book for each officer, guide and employee. Measuring the body temperature of all employees upon arrival at the workplace. Employees

showing signs of flu, cough, fever or arrived from an epidemic area, must not go to work and must monitor their health at home”.

Point k, Clause 1, Article 4 has been updated to “Appointing leaders to take charge and monitor the prevention and control of the COVID-19 pandemic. Officials, tour guides and employees must not give any false or unverified information about the COVID-19 epidemic situation at the tourist service centres. Establishing and publishing a hotline and exchanging information, supporting customers”.

Point e, Clause 2, Article 4 of the Instruction, regulated on “Not sharing, posting any information related to the epidemic conditions at tourism service centres on social media and other media platforms”, applied for tourists, service users and contact people has been removed following Decision 474.

d. Issuing Temporary Guidelines no. 3862/HD-BVHTTDL on implementing Resolution No. 128/NQ-CP, October 11th, 2021 on promulgating the Interim Regulation on “safe and flexible adaptation and effective control over the COVID-19 pandemic” of the Government for culture, sport and tourism activities. Guidelines no. 3862/HD-BVHTTDL includes the general regulations on organizing culture, sport, and tourism activities; and detailed descriptions applied for each level of the pandemic.

For tourism sectors, the Guidelines states that:

- Subjects of application: Travel, tourism transportation enterprises; Destination/Tourism Area Management Organizations/Officers; accommodation centres; tourism service providers; workers at tourism enterprises; tourists and customers of tourism enterprises; contact people and suppliers at tourism enterprises.

- On medical check:

- + Apply medical test for cases that have symptoms: fever, cough, exhaustion, sore throat, shortness of breath, etc; Apply random and periodic screening tests, conducted by medical bodies;

- + Request medical testing for cases that are suspected/under epidemiological investigation arrived from Level 3 areas; cases from Level 4 areas and areas with lockdown restriction. Medical testing is not applied to local residents.

- + For people who have completed the vaccination and individuals who had recovered from COVID-19, apply medical testing when: (1) the individual is under epidemiological investigation, (2) the individual is from Level 4 areas or areas with lockdown restriction.

+ For RT-PCR and rapid antigen test results, the negative result is valid within 72 hours from the issuing of the result.

- Regulations for tourism enterprises:

+ General regulations: For areas with the pandemic level of 1 and 2: Tourism activities are allowed to be organized and operated at the maximum capacity. For Level 3 areas: Only indoor tourism/event activities or tours with less than 25 participants are allowed to be organized and operated; Accommodation centres, F&B serving areas within tourism service establishments are allowed to operate with less than 50% of capacity at once; transportations for tourists can only serve 50% of total seats; services with high contagion risks such as night clubs, karaoke, massage parlour, internet cafe, gaming centres, hair and beauty salons must strictly follow the regulations of Provincial/City People's Committee; Tourism accommodation centres those act as isolation centres following the request of the authority, must strictly implement preventive measures issued by the local medical authority; Accommodation centres those are serving more than 50% of the maximum capacity are not allowed to welcome new customers. For Level 4 areas: All tourism activities at tourism sites are compulsorily banned; indoor events for more than 20 participants are compulsorily banned; tours, arrivals, departures at/to/from the destination are compulsorily banned; Accommodation centres, F&B serving areas within tourism service establishments are allowed to operate with less than 30% of capacity at once; transportations for tourists can only serve 50% of total seats; services with high contagion risks such as night clubs, karaoke, massage parlour, internet cafe, gaming centres, hair and beauty salons must strictly follow the regulations of Provincial/City People's Committee; Tourism accommodation centres those act as isolation centres following the request of the authority, must strictly implement preventive measures issued by the local medical authority; Accommodation centres those are serving more than 30% of the maximum capacity are not allowed to welcome new customers.

+ Detailed requirements: (a) Design the plan for COVID-19 prevention and the set of responses when receiving infected cases following the regulations. *dựng kế hoạch phòng, chống dịch COVID-19 và phương án xử lý khi có trường hợp mắc COVID-19 theo quy định.* Organizing the administration board to monitor and to be responsible for the mission of preventing COVID-19. Measuring the body temperature of all employees upon arrival at the workplace. Employees showing signs of flu, cough, fever or arrived from an epidemic area, must not go to work and must monitor their health at home. (b) Organize the reception areas, entrances and routes following the social distancing regulations of the Ministry of Health. Posters for safety instruction and QR codes for COVID control must be placed in reception areas, public areas, on transportation, service areas and guest bedrooms for accommodation centres.. (c) Measure the body temperature of all service users,

contact people, suppliers applied for Level 3 and Level 4 areas; provide face mask for customers/visitors when needed. (d) d) Provide handwashing facilities with clean water, soap, and tissues or place alcohol-based hand sanitisers at reception, services areas, elevators, rooms, departments, offices, staff fitting rooms/lockers according to the instructions of the Ministry of Health. e) Regularly clean, disinfect public areas, crowded service points, means of transport, tourist accommodations, equipment and tools to serve tourists as guided by health authorities. (f) Guests' clothing and hotel laundry bags are collected and transferred to the laundry area according to the instructions and recommendations of the health authorities. (g) Establish and publicize hotlines to exchange information and support customers. Immediately notify local health authorities if there were suspected cases with COVID-19 symptoms. (h) Tourism businesses must register and conduct a daily COVID-19 safety self-assessment at <http://safe.tourism.com.vn> to connect to the national COVID safety system. (i) Service personnel are instructed and disseminated regulations on prevention and control of COVID-19; complying with the "5K protocol" in the workplace; executing medical tests as prescribed in Clause 2, Section III of this Guide.

- Regarding requirements for tourists, service customers and those in contact or business tourism service enterprises: Properly comply with the "5K protocol"; medical declaration as prescribed or through scanning QR code. Fully be aligned with the regulations of the National Steering Committee for COVID-19 Prevention and Control, the Ministry of Health and regulations of tourism business establishments themselves. Comply with medical testing as prescribed by the Guidelines./.

ENHANCING THE LINKAGE AND COOPERATION BETWEEN THE HEALTH AND TOURISM SECTORS TO ENSURE THE HEALTH SAFETY OF TOURISTS UNDER PANDEMIC CONDITIONS

MSc. Hoang Van Ngoc

- General Department of Preventive Medicine, Ministry of Health

I. The role of preventive safety measures in ensuring the health safety of tourists under COVID-19 conditions

Having multiple notable destinations, with a high variety of tourism products, Vietnam has a strong potential to develop its tourism industry. However, the strike of the COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in serious damages to the sector. From early 2020 to October 17th, 2021, Vietnam has gone through 4 waves of COVID-19 with more than 860,000 cases; especially, 858,000 cases¹ were detected in the 4th wave, with 21,000 deaths². Vietnam ranked 155/223 globally, ranked 09/11 in the ASEAN area in terms of infection cases per million people. To prevent the spread of the virus, Vietnam had to adopt several non-pharmaceutical interventions (social distancing, limiting domestic and international flight, restricting social gathering, etc.), thus tourism activities for both international and domestic tourists were forced to shut down for a long period. Currently, when the situation turns to the “new normal”, the tourism sector is now having the opportunity to gradually recover from a long suspension time. During this recovery process, maintaining the implementation of safety measures is recognized as a crucial factor, in order to protect the tourists from COVID-19 contagion risk.

- Following the 5K regulation of the Ministry of Health

According to WHO, the SARS-CoV-2 virus (which causes COVID-19) is transmitted through droplets and aerosols when the infected person coughs, sneezes, speaks, sings or breathes. Thus, close contact (less than 1m) can result in the infection of the virus SARS-CoV-2, especially in poorly ventilated and crowded environments. The virus can also be transmitted through touching the eyes, nose, or mouth after having direct contact with liquid that contains the virus on surfaces, objects, polluted areas. Even when having no symptoms, the infected person can still transmit the virus to others. The average incubation period (from the moment of being exposed to the

¹ The proportion of infected cases, divided by age groups: from 0-2 years old: 2.5%; 3-12 years old: 8.9%; 13-17 years old: 5.7%; 18-49 years old: 61.9%; 50-65 years old: 15.6%; over 65 years old: 5.3%.

² The proportion of death infected cases, divided by age groups: from 0-2 years old: 0.19%; 3-12 years old: 0.06%; 13-17 years old: 0.09%; 18-49 years old: 17.9%; 50-64 years old: 38.72%; over 65 years old: 43.04%.

virus, until having the symptoms) is 5-6 days, which can be up to 14 days³⁴. The infected person can transmit the virus to others 2 days before showing any symptoms.

Based on the scientific foundation and the practical conditions in Vietnam, the Vietnamese Ministry of Health has provided 5K standards: “Khau trang (Mask) – Khu khuan (Sterilisation) – Khoang cach (Distancing) – Khong tap trung (No social gathering) – Khai bao y te (Health Declaration)”. These are simple but effective strategies to actively prevent the spread of the virus. Infected people following the 5K regulation can also support the medical authorities in fast tracing potential cases and quickly handling the outbreaks. Research also shows that, with 100% of passengers wearing a mask on the airplane, the average contagion risk can be reduced by roughly 75%, compared to non-mask-wearing passengers⁵.

- Pre-departure COVID-19 testing and medical declaration

Evaluating the models of the SARS-CoV-2 transmission, passengers travelling with infected people are exposed to high contagion risk. Research on the transmission on long-haul flight shows that passengers those sit less than 2 seats close to the infected person has the contagion risk 7 times higher than those are distanced more than 2 seats away⁶. Thus the implementation of pre-departure COVID-19 testing is crucial. Another research reveals that, by forcing passengers to submit their negative result of COVID-19 testing 72 hours before the flight, the risk of transmission can be significantly reduced (down to just 0.1%). Currently, Vietnam is requesting the compulsory submission of the negative result of COVID-19 testing for all arrivals.

Besides COVID-19 testing, the application of health declaration apps can be beneficial in tracing infected cases and warning people who had interacted with the infected individual, thus limiting the contagion risk. In Iran, the health declaration mobile app has traced 74% of people with COVID-19 symptoms⁷. In Vietnam, adopting compulsory digital health declaration upon arrival has shortened the time for tracing people contacted with positive cases to just a few hours.

- Vaccination

December 12th, 2020, an urgent approval on the first type of COVID-19 vaccine for humans (Pfizer/BioNTech) was given by WHO. Until October 17th, 2021, 7 types of vaccines have been approved to use for humans by WHO, with many other types had been allowed for nationwide emergency use by country authorities. Currently, more than 6.6 billion doses of vaccines have been distributed across the globe⁸. Despite the

³ <https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/question-and-answers-hub/q-a-detail/coronavirus-disease-covid-19-how-is-it-transmitted>

⁴ <https://www.who.int/news-room/commentaries/detail/transmission-of-sars-cov-2-implications-for-infection-prevention-precautions>

⁵ <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC8233548/>

⁶ <https://wwwnc.cdc.gov/eid/article/26/11/pdfs/20-3299-combined.pdf>

⁷ <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/34537686/>

⁸ <https://ourworldindata.org/covid-vaccinations>

differences in terms of effects between types of vaccine, scientific proof has shown that vaccination is beneficial for decreasing the death rate, hospitalized rate of COVID-19 infected cases and contagion rate⁹.

In Vietnam, until October 17th, 2021, more than 64 million vaccine doses have been injected across the nation. Vaccination is seen as the factor that set the foundation for reconnecting travel and business activities across the globe, as well as recovering the tourism sector. Many countries have determined that the vaccination progress is the core criteria to evaluate the current prevention of COVID-19, as well as the key condition to restarting the economy and tourism¹⁰. Similarly in Vietnam, the vaccination rate is among 3 factors for pandemic evaluation, supporting the issues of relevant measures and policies¹¹.

II. Cooperation between the tourism and medical sector in preventing COVID-19 diseases and ensuring health safety for tourists

Across 4 waves of COVID-19 pandemic (from early 2020 until now), despite several adjustments in terms of approaches, strategies and methodology in controlling the pandemic to match situational changes, the tourism and medical sector has always remained their strong linkages to ensure that the health security of the people always come first and foremost. Together, the two sectors have:

- Information activities and executive directing: The Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism and The Ministry of Health are members of the National Steering Committee for controlling COVID-19 outbreaks (following Decision no. 170/QĐ-TTg on establishing the National Steering Committee for prevention and control of respiratory diseases caused by new strains of Coronavirus, issued January 1st, 2020). Thus the information activities and executive directing of two ministries are nationwide comprehensive, strictly following the general direction of the National Steering Committee.

- Implementing safety measures for tourists:

- + Arrivals: The National Steering Committee for controlling COVID-19 outbreaks decided to implement compulsory medical declaration upon all arrivals from March 6th, 2020 (according to Official Dispatch 1115/CV-BCĐ). For tourists, from the cooperation between two sectors, the implementation of health declaration at all accommodation centers in the country had been executed only one week after the issue of Official Dispatch 1115/CV-BCĐ (see Official Dispatch 1263/BYT-CNTT, issued March 13th, 2021). This response had made a crucial impact on supporting the successful control of the COVID-19 pandemic in the 1st, 2nd and 3rd wave, as well as

⁹ <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7969187/>

¹⁰ <https://www.movehub.com/blog/countries-using-covid-passports/>

¹¹ Resolution No. 128/NQ-CP dated October 11, 2021, on promulgating the Interim Regulation on “safe and flexible adaptation and effective control over the COVID-19 pandemic”

providing health protection for tourists and the tourism labor force. Employees who were diagnosed with COVID-19 at Da Nang, Hoi An, Lao Cai, etc., were all detected, isolated and treated on time. Information and updates for tourists on safety measures and entry policies are regularly provided by the two sectors

+ At tourism service centers: To ensure the safety of tourists when travelling in Vietnam, the two sectors have created, issued and directed the implementation of safety measures to support tourism entities in self-evaluating and declaring their contagion risk¹².

III. Recommendations on the cooperation between the medical and tourism sector in ensuring the health safety of tourists under pandemic conditions

- The two ministries continue the strong cooperation to officially issue the Safety Standards for operating tourism activities under the “new normal”, with detailed regulations and recommendations for activities related to travelling, accommodation, services, F&B, applied standards for service providers and tourists, etc. The application of the 5K standards is compulsory.

- The two sectors cooperate in planning, pilot testing, extending the adaption of safe tourism models and tours, based on level of contagion risk at the area, regulated in Resolution No. 128/NQ-CP dated October 11, 2021, on promulgating the Interim Regulation on “safe and flexible adaptation and effective control over the COVID-19 pandemic”.

- Since Vietnam is moving from the “Zero COVID” strategy to “safe and flexible adaptation and effective control over the COVID-19 pandemic”, the risk of having more infected cases from the tourist source can be significantly increased. Thus, cooperation between the two sectors needs to be enhanced in the future, in order to meet tourists’ demands in terms of information exposure, disease prevention practices and medical care for safe travelling under COVID-19 conditions./.

¹² Official Dispatch no. 831/BYT-MT, issued February 21st, 2020 of the Ministry of Health; Official Dispatch no. 810/BVHTTDL-VHCS, issued March 15th, 2021 and Official Dispatch no. 4159/BVHTTDL-TCDL, issued November 9th, 2020 of the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism.

THE POST-COVID-19 RECOVERY PLAN FOR TOURISM IN VIETNAM

M.A Hoang Thu Huyen - Vietnam National Administration of Tourism

The COVID-19 outbreak, especially the current 4th wave of the pandemic that is raging across the nation, has pushed the Vietnamese tourism industry to hit its rock bottom, remains stuck in the middle of the tourism global crisis. The freeze of international tourism continues to happen under pandemic circumstances. For the domestic sector, by only welcoming 31.5 tourists in the first 9 months of the year, domestic tourism just earns 136 billion VND for tourism revenue, 41.27% decreased, compared to the same period in 2020. The national occupancy rate in the first 9 months of 2021 is below 10%. Witnessing the downturn of all growth indicators, tourism in Vietnam is suffering the hardest time in our history.

I. The responses of Vietnam: Safe and flexible adaption to the pandemic for reopening the economy and the tourism industry

On June 11th, 2021, The Politburo of Vietnam has agreed with the declarations in Conclusion No. 7-KL/TW about the key missions in strengthening COVID-19 prevention and ensuring socio-economic development. The declarations including initiating the study on applying “vaccine passport” in several pilot destination that has controlled the epidemic, such as Phu Quoc (Kien Giang).

On September 15th, 2021, United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) announced that it is possible for destinations to safely welcome international tourists again, under the condition of having suitable policies and maintain a strong collaboration between tourism stakeholders. By successfully reopening international tourism while meeting safety requirements, the industry can be able to witness inclusive recovery and growth.

On September 25th. 2021, PM Pham Minh Chinh directed the subordinate levels to switch from the “Zero COVID” strategy to “safe and flexible adaptation to and effective management of the pandemic” strategy. Dr. Tran Dac Phu, former Director of the Department of Preventive Medicine, shared that the concept of "living with the pandemic" should be understood as meeting both the goals of controlling the COVID-19 outbreak, developing the economy and ensuring social security at the same time.

For international tourism, its recovery relies on the pandemic situation of the country in a specific period, indicated by several epidemiological factors such as the rate of infected new entrants, the rate of new cases within the community, COVID-19 death rates, the current national vaccination progress, etc...

For domestic tourism, under the current situation, Vietnam determined that safe and strong progress of reopening tourism in COVID-free areas is vital. Also, ensuring flexible adaption and strategy completion across the recovery process is the key to adapting to the high uncertainty under pandemic operating conditions, meeting specific goals in each phase of tourism recovery, thus pushing the revitalization of Vietnamese tourism towards a safe and sustainable direction

II. Key requirements for restarting tourism

“Restarting tourism activities – the key strategy to support tourism enterprises”

Based on the fact that Vietnamese tourism enterprises are struggling to not be swept out of the market, reopening tourism is seen as the most effective solution to support tourism businesses. This has raised the requirement of maintaining safe conditions while operating tourism activities.

1. Objectives and requirements

- Resetting tourism in areas with low risk of contagion “Level 1 – Safe destination (Green area)” at the beginning, then moving towards the goal of operating “green routes” by connecting safe tourism destinations. This process requires following a suitable, controlled and precise schedule to ensure flexibility and proactiveness in COVID-19 responses.

- Taking the advantage of safe opportunities to restart tourism and support services following a timely and suitable approach.

2. Detailed schedule:

2.1. For domestic tourism

- Requirements to welcome tourists:

- + Strictly following the COVID-19 safety procedure to maintain security for the tourists and the destination.

- + Applying safety ensuring solutions including vaccination, RT-PCR COVID testing, following 5K standards, health declaration, QR code scanning, PC-COVID mobile

- Detailed timeline:

- + October 2021: Organizing training sessions on regulations and safety measures against the COVID-19 pandemic, on procedures for welcoming and serving tourists, service safety standards. Planning and preparing backup resources to handle contagion incidents and risks. Determining and connecting COVID-free destinations. Implementing effective communication strategies

+ From November 2021: Welcoming domestic tourists from green areas following the safety procedure. Ensuring the flexibility and convenience for tourists

2.2. For international tourism

- Requirements to welcome tourists:

+ Implementing vaccination strategy, with at least 90% of local residents and workers completed the 2-dose series.

+ The tourist needs to meet the standards for vaccine passport, receives the negative result for PCR COVID testing within 72 hours before departure and satisfy other requirements

+ Tourist needs to participate in package tours as prescribed by selected tourism service providers.

+ Strictly following the safety process of welcoming and serving tourists under COVID-19 conditions, meeting the 5K standards while organizing any activity, preparing for medical incidents. Organizing training sessions on regulations and safety measures against the COVID-19 pandemic for the active labor force in the destination.

- Detailed timeline:

(1) From October 2021 to March 2022: pilot testing in Phu Quoc:

+ Target groups: International tourists from target markets that have controlled the pandemic and have high vaccination capabilities, including Northeast Asia, Europe, the United States, the Middle East, Australia, etc...; tourists will arrive in Phu Quoc international airports through charter flights

+ Requirements: Tourist needs to meet the requirements related to vaccination, has the negative result for COVID testing within 72 hours, registered to participate in package tours as prescribed by selected tourism service providers. The selection process for the service providers is conducted by the authority, following detailed and explicit criteria.

(2) From December 2021 to June 2022: Beginning to expand the model of safe destination for international tourism, based on the observation from the pilot testing in Phu Quoc. Potential destinations are Ha Long (Quang Ninh), Hoi An (Quang Nam), Nha Trang (Khanh Hoa) and Da Lat (Lam Dong).

(3) From June 2022: Being fully open to welcome international tourists.

III. Challenges in implementing the tourism recovery plan

1. The large disparity in vaccine coverage among areas, including vaccination rates for tourism workers, has limited the ability of destinations in welcoming tourists.

2. Regulations related to vaccine passport/vaccination certificate, accessibility, quarantine, and isolation remain discordant.

3. Lack of official announcement from local authorities on services and destinations that are allowed to operate, thus limited the ability of enterprises in designing relevant tourism products. Lack of policies to support and increase the demand for domestic tourism.

IV. Solutions for tourism recovery post-covid-19

1. Organizing and conducting the tourism recovery plan by the current condition of the local area, following the “safe and flexible adaptation to and effective management of the pandemic” strategy and Plan No. 3228/KH-BVHTTDL about implementing policies, applying measures to stimulate demand, reactivating tourism and travel activities. In more detail, Plan No. 3228 includes 6 core measures:

(1) Ensuring safety for tourists and destinations.

(2) Enhancing the effectiveness of tourism communication and promotion strategies.

(3) Increasing the variety of tourism products to meet the new trends in the market.

(4) Accelerating the digital transformation process in the tourism sector.

(5) Supporting tourism enterprises to timely restart tourism activities.

(6) Improving the performance of the tourism labor force to meet the recovery demand.

2. Timely promulgate relevant policies and recovery measures (such as providing free or discounted destination entry tickets) to support tourism enterprises in maintaining the operation, restarting business activities, establishing new tourism products, providing training sessions for the tourism labor force, etc.

3. Restarting tourism following a detailed plan, avoiding hasty implementation and ensuring effectiveness in executing the recovery plan

- In the first phase, enhancing the demand of local visitors is vital. Then moved to support tourism between “green areas” and “green destination”, gradually expanding tourism recovery across the nation.

- Ensuring the effectiveness in preparing safe conditions to reopen tourism:

(1) Implementing the vaccination programs for residents and the labor force.

(2) Creating safe tourism programs and products, safe destinations base on the new market demand.

(3) Determining the target markets, key destinations, routes, and suitable service providers for restarting tourism.

(4) Preparing regulations and guidelines about the process of safe welcoming and serving tourists with “vaccine passport”.

- Deploying effective communication and promotion strategies for tourism recovery and safe tourism destinations.

- Preparing the medical capacity, ensuring human capital and resource readiness, building safety plans for disease prevention and controlling, handling medical incidents.

4. Enhancing the linkage and cooperation between areas to boost tourism development.

- Guaranteeing mutual agreements between local authorities in operating, managing tourism and exchanging tourists under safe conditions. Ensuring that the principle of meeting anti- COVID and economic development goals at the same time is being followed by regions.

- Building and establishing safe destinations, enhancing the effectiveness of communication and promotion strategies between destinations, ensuring effective cross-region tourist management for the security of tourists and communities under COVID-19 conditions.

- Directing local tourism businesses in building tourism programs for tourist exchange between destinations

- Enforcing effective communication and providing instructions for tourism enterprises, service providers, destinations and tourists to follow safety guidelines for preventing COVID-19 contagion and related regulations.

- Cooperating to build safe tourism programs, safe tourism packages, safe destinations, safe tourism models in isolated areas. Applying the self-contained service operation system to eliminate the risk of contagion.

- Focusing on working with local authorities, especially those from key tourism areas, utilizing the comprehensive power of the whole industry to find the solution for restarting tourism. Prioritizing the determination of specific tourism products for each key tourism area, with a detailed and accurate orientation to development.

5. Taking the advantage of ICTs and digital transformation, continuing to boost tourism product advertisement and promotion on social media platforms. Optimizing the effectiveness of tourism promotion to traditional markets for reopening international tourism.

Restarting tourism activities is identified as vital for the revitalization and development of the tourism industry after the long period of stagnation due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. Especially for tourism enterprises, restarting tourism can support them to survive the COVID-19 crisis, then can further develop the business performance under the new normal condition. To effectively restore tourism activities and set the foundation for future growth, the cooperation between tourism stakeholders (local authorities, business entities, etc.) is identified as the key solution./.

ENSURING THE ORGANIZATION OF SAFE TRAVEL IN THE CONTEXT OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

M.A Vu An Dan - Hanoi Open University, Faculty of Tourism

I. Context:

COVID-19 has put Global Tourism into the most difficult period in history. The World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) reported that in 2021, the COVID-19 pandemic is expected to cost the global economy about \$2.4 trillion due to the collapse of international tourism. Travel restrictions to prevent the spread of COVID-19 has plunged global tourism into a serious crisis.

In Vietnam, in 2020, Vietnam's tourism was severely affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. According to the General Statistics Office, the number of international visitors to Vietnam only reached about 3.7 million, declining by 79.5% compared to 2019; domestic tourists only accounted for 56 million arrivals, hitting a drop of 34.1%; total revenue from tourists reached 312 trillion VND, falling about 58.7%, equivalent to revenue of 19 billion USD. In the first seven months of 2021, international visitors to our country are estimated at 95,719 arrivals, drastically leveled down by a proportion of 97.5% over the same period last year. Domestic tourists also decreased quite sharply: in April 2021, the number of domestic tourists reached 9 million, but by July 2021, this number was left to be 0.5 million.

In the fight against the pandemic, ensuring safety is paramount, but stimulating the recovery of economic activities including tourism is a critical mission. On June 11, 2021, the Political Bureau agreed at Conclusion No. 07-KL/TU on several key tasks to strengthen COVID-19 prevention, control and socio-economic development. Achieving the dual goals of the tourism industry requires innovative ways to quickly revive tourism while simultaneously ensuring the safety of both the local community and visitors, maintaining a safe, friendly and attractive Vietnam destination brand.

II. Re-launch tourism and ensure the safety of visitors

1. General principles and directions

Immediately after the impact of the first wave on tourism, the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) has issued the Global Guidelines to Restart Tourism. Some of the principles introduced at that time that are still valid today include:

- Safe and seamless travel;

- Procedures and information are clear and proven;
- Share data in accordance with approved guidelines and in compliance with the privacy policy;
- Non-discrimination against tourists;
- Digital transformation;
- Develop a responsive policy that can change or cancel services to better suit the situation.

Experts' discussions towards safely restarting and reopening tourism are all about deploying vaccination and implementing 5K (Masks – Disinfection – Distance – Dispersion – Medical declaration or “Khẩu trang – Khử khuẩn – Khoảng cách – Không tập trung – Khai báo y tế”). In addition to preventing the spread of the virus, preparations for medical incidents also need to be taken into account. On September 23, 2021 via the online meeting with Kien Giang province and Phu Quoc city's People's Committees, to review the work in the pilot plan to welcome international tourists to Phu Quoc, Deputy Minister Doan Van Viet has noted 4 important factors in the “close welcome” model, including executing vaccination strategy to obtain community immunity; vaccination certificate; medical procedures for pandemic prevention; and healthcare capacity in handling medical incidents.

2. Some specific suggestions

In terms of tourism activities, having close contact and communication is inevitable. In addition, tourism also requires mobility. These elements increase the risk of cross-contamination that endangers the safety of visitors and local communities. Therefore, in restarting and reopening tourism activities, the focus point must revolve around the method to minimize the risks from these factors. Some techniques below could be considered:

Enable a safe destination:

One of the primary criteria to help ensure a safe destination lies in locals' ability to protect themselves and prevent COVID-19 infection through vaccination. Some countries around the world are satisfied with the vaccination rate of residents in tourist destinations at 70% such as Thailand and Phuket, others strive with the goal of 100% such as Greece. Besides vaccination, the criteria of health facilities' capacity are also concerned. Hence, relying on the capacity of medical facilities for COVID-19 patient treatments must also be an important basis, along with the capacity of service touchpoints (to ensure the distancing procedures) in determining the carrying capacity of the destination to identify the possible number of guests as well as develop policies and procedures in booking services at tourist destinations.

Make sure to welcome a safe source of customers:

This selection is necessary to minimize the risk of cross-contamination. The basic criteria for choosing a safe source of visitors should include vaccination history (2 doses of vaccine), vaccination duration of at least 14 days (according to EU standards issued for tourists) and had a negative PCR test performed up to 72 hours earlier.

Ensure safe-service process:

Procedures should aim at avoiding cross-contamination, especially the safety and safe-service capacity of units participating in the tourism supply chain. All organizations and individuals involved in the supply chain are required to operate in a closed manner and form "green corridors" with the same methods used by airline routes when receiving different groups of passengers to avoid the risk of infection right within these "green corridors". The use of information technology-enabled processes to segment, set up the order of service catering and provide self-service are crucial to block or limit cross-interaction between multiple groups of guests when serving them at the same location and time.

Digital transformation:

Service operations and practices need to be analyzed to find out what steps can be digitized. This is to suppress direct and close contact between service staff and customers to reduce the risk of infection. Check-in for a room without contacting the receptionist, non-cash payment, directly contactless payment cards... are just a few of the many ways to go. These digital applications not only support in the prevention of Covid, create safety but also help cut down labor costs. The major issue currently is the convenience and processing speed to lessen interaction time of device usage. Minimizing interaction time will significantly reduce queuing time, a factor that causes crowding and increases the risk of infection.

Safe product development:

During this period, safe products are to be defined in a way that decreases the possibility of cross-contamination between travelers. Thus, these products are conditioned to serve groups of customers that are small or have familiarity and understanding of each other's epidemiological situation. Again, noteworthy is to foster the presence of information technology so that guests can book tours for their groups of acquaintances at a comfortable cost similar to a large-sized packaged tour.

Above are some sharing about ensuring safety in the process of reopening, restarting tourism in general, and safety for tourists in particular.

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THE CASES OF CONTACTLESS TOURISM SERVICES AND POLICY DIRECTIONS

*M.A Heejeong Han - Associate Research Fellow
Korea Culture & Tourism Institute*

2021 Korea–Vietnam Tourism Seminar

The cases of contactless tourism services and policy directions

October 22, 2021

Heejeong Han (Associate Research Fellow)



The cases of contactless tourism services and policy directions

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- I. Contactless tourism services and safety of tourists
- II. Use cases and impact of contactless tourism services
- III. Tourism industry responses and challenges



*This presentation is based on the research publication, "The cases of contactless tourism services and policy directions", by Jiyun Yu and Heejeong Han(2021).

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I. Contactless tourism services and safety of tourists

1. Background

2. Concept

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1. Background

Transmitted through respiratory droplets or direct contact with infected people

6 ft
Stay at least 6 feet (about 2 arm lengths) from other people.

Cover your cough or sneeze with a tissue, then throw the tissue in the trash and wash your hands.

When in public, wear a mask over your nose and mouth.

Do not touch your eyes, nose, and mouth.

Clean and disinfect frequently touched objects and surfaces.

Stay home when you are sick, except to get medical care.

Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds.

Remote delivery, Online shopping, Unmanned stores

Distance education, Remote work

Remote performance

Contactless Service

※ Source: CDC website (cdc.gov/coronavirus)

※ Source: Heriokai Ito (www.herikokai.com/News/Feed/A2020112711510003010)

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1. Background

Spread of contactless tourism services to minimize contact due to COVID-19



2. Concept

What is a contactless tourism service?

Contact-less, contact-free, low touch, uncontact, uncontact, oncontact, non-contact...

Concept

A tourism service that minimizes contact and maintains a **connection** with the tourism service or provider based on **digital technology** while providing enhanced **safety** and **convenience to tourists**



II. Use cases and impact of contactless tourism services

1. Use cases

2. Policies

3. Impact and features

1. Use cases

Contactless tourism services in the tourism market

Travel industry

- Online-based travel recommendations, booking, and payments
- Real-time virtual travel content (Online tour)



※ Source: MyReal Trip website (<https://www.myrealtip.com/>)



※ Source: Atrib website (<https://www.attrib.co.kr/>)

Tourism and lodging

- Check-in/out using Self-service Technology (SST)



※ Source: Paradise Hotel Busan website (www.busanparadisehotel.co.kr/)

- Delivery of services using delivery robots



※ Source: Lotte Hotel Magazine website (<https://www.lottehotelmagazine.com/>)

International conference

- Hybrid conferences, exhibitions and webinars



※ Source: EventX website (<https://eventx.co/>)



※ Source: Indoor Air 2020 website (<http://www.indoorair2020.org/>)

1. Use cases

Contactless tourism services in the tourism market

Casino

- Offering unmanned services (via chip/voucher/event kiosk)
- Contactless (online) casino



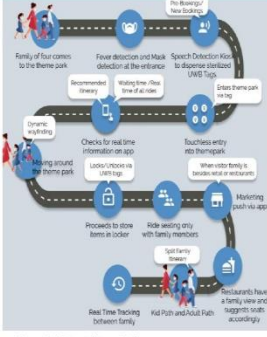
※ Source: Seven Luck Casino website (www.7luck.com)



※ Source: ismg.com (Apr. 17, 2014)

Recreational Facilities


- Attractions using VR
- Provides information, marketing activities, and make payments with robots, kiosks, and wearable devices



※ Source: CDO Trends (Mar. 5, 2021)


Tourist entertainment facilities and Tourist convenience facilities

- Congestion information, unmanned control service (Destinations and tourist facilities)



※ Source: VisitJig website (https://www.visitjig.net/kr/visitormap/)

- Unmanned stores, unmanned kiosks



※ Source: Money Today (May 9, 2020)




1. Use cases

Overseas contactless public tourism services: Maintain and expand existing services


Before Trip → During Trip → After Trip

Real-time tourist information (congestion)



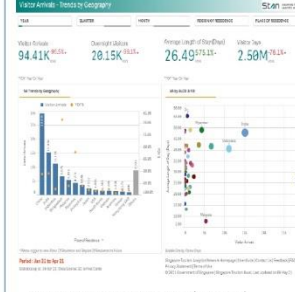
※ Source: Mincih (2018, 2019)

Unmanned tour guide service



※ Source: Newark City (www.newarkcity.gov), Live Amsterdam YouTube Channel

Tourist Behavior Analysis



※ Source: Singapore Tourism Analytics Network (stanstb.gov.sg)



1. Use cases

Overseas contactless public tourism services: New type of service

During Trip

Immobile Tourism Service

Touchless technology at airports



※ Source: Changi Airport (www.changiairport.com)

Safety and quarantine: Congestion and quarantine management, Contactless access control



※ Source: WITCO (www.witco.org)

Virtual reality content



※ Source: Incheon Tourism Official Website (www.inba.or.kr)

Vaccine passport



※ Source: https://www.bbc.com/news/health-61849488

Online contactless events



※ Source: Singapore Tourism Analytics Network (stan.sg.sg)



2. Policies

Prioritize securing safety while maintaining the convenience of tourists



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2. Policies

Implement policies to secure tourist safety, foster contactless tourism business, and support tourists

Top 100 non-face-to-face tourist destinations



※ Source: visitkorea.or.kr

Guam Safe Certified



※ Source: visitguam.com

K-untact global Innovative Venture 100 project

- Set support system for each growth stage of contactless innovative ventures
- Create domestic demand and promote globalization
- Build an ecosystem for contactless innovative venture

Digital Inclusion Strategy

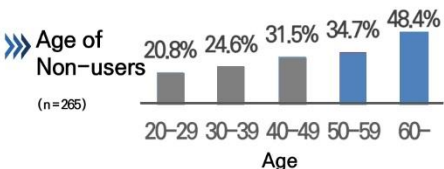
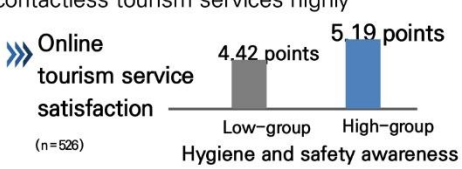
- Support the development of digital capabilities for individuals, public institutions and private companies
- Provide learning program focused on online access and Internet use, Internet use ability, understanding the value of Internet use, and resolving concerns about Internet crime

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3. Impact and features

Features regarding the use of contactless tourism services

Non-users	Users
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High proportion of the elderly • Low awareness of contactless tourism services • Prefer hands-on tourism 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Highly used contactless tourism services for searching information, booking, payment, check-in, and using transportation • Low positive perception of contactless tourism services among the elderly • People with high hygiene and safety awareness perceived the benefits of contactless tourism services highly
<p>Age of Non-users (n=265)</p> 	<p>Online tourism service satisfaction (n=526)</p> 

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3. Impact and features

The Key is to expand the tourism experience and offer comfortable and safe tourism services

- Enhancing tourist safety and convenience with digital technology**
 - : Utilize quarantine technology, tourist dispersion technology, unmanned device, and etc.
 - : Utilize immersive technologies such as AR, VR, and MR
- Integration based on tourism experience process (contactless + face-to-face)**
 - : Online – distribution and transaction of tourism services,
 - Offline – majority of consumption
- Contactless tourism service, a new catalyst for tourism development**
 - : Create new services, expand digital use, and changes in tourist decision-making
- Needs for contactless tourism services that everyone can enjoy**
 - : Increased demand in service for the vulnerable (physically weak, weak in tourism information, etc.)

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III. Tourism Industry Responses and Challenges

1. Response directions
2. Response tasks

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1. Response directions

The role of contactless tourism services in the tourism industry

: It is necessary to reflect the technology and tourism characteristics of contactless services including safety-oriented and digital-based services.

Meaning
of
Contactless
tourism
service

Services that allow safe tourism activities via digital technology

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Contactless tourism service

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😊

Tourist safety
+
Tourist satisfaction
➔➔➔ Tourism activities

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1. Response directions

Contactless tourism services
 Enhance tourist safety and satisfaction

Safety

Satisfaction

Contactless tourism service

1 Develop contactless tourism services for a safe tourism experience

- Support for building contactless tourism public services
- Support R&D for contactless tourism service
- Find contactless tourism service companies

+

2 Provide contactless tourism service to increase tourist satisfaction

- Contactless tourism R&D for improved access for the vulnerable
- Discover contactless tourism content and public services
- Quality certification for contactless tourism service

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Develop contactless tourism services for a **safe** tourism experience

2. Response tasks

Support building contactless tourism public services

- Support for service, equipment and system construction costs for tourist destinations and tourist facilities that are having difficulties in using contactless tourism service facilities and equipment



Support R&D for contactless tourism services

- Create a new business model for contactless tourism services related to tourist safety and advance content
- (Example) Establish support system for tourist safety and quarantine



Discover contactless tourism service business

- Support contactless tourism service providers for the tourist safety
- (Details) Provide supports including technology development, R&D, market consulting, cooperation with other companies, research institutes, and universities, etc., public relations and market development support, etc.





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Providing contactless tourism service to **enhance** tourism satisfaction

2. Response tasks


Increased access for the vulnerable
Contactless tourism R&D

- Develop and advance contactless tourism services and systems tailored to the vulnerable (the elderly, physically weak, etc.)
- (Support area) contactless tourism service UI/UX, voice support, etc.



Contactless tourism content and discovering public services

- Promote public content and product contests for contactless tourism services
- Reinforce support for production process to accelerate the transition of conventional tourism content to contactless services



Quality certification for contactless tourism service

- Set the quality certification standards for contactless tourism service and conduct evaluation
- (Example of standards) Convenience, accessibility, safety, user protection, etc.





Thank you

THE DIRECTION OF TOURISM POLICY IN THE POST - COVID-19 ERA

Dr. Hyun Ju Kim - Research Fellow

Korea Culture & Tourism Institute



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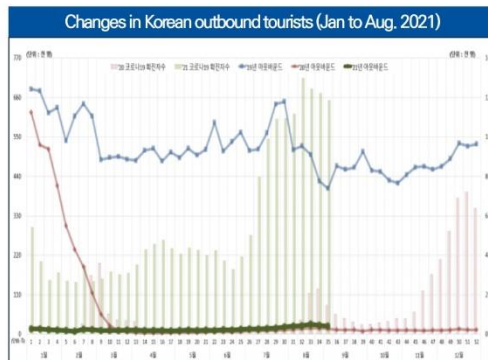
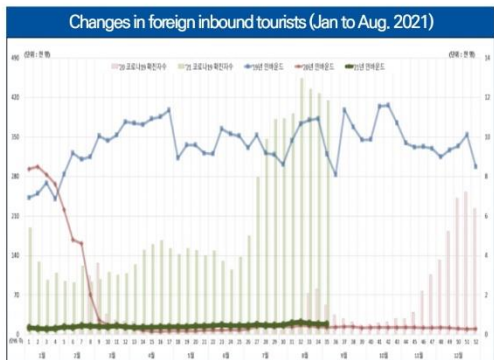
The impact of COVID-19 on tourism sector

1. The impact of COVID-19 on tourism sector

Brought international tourism exchanges to a halt in 2021, and the number of inbound and outbound tourists continues to fell by 95% compared to 2019

Foreign visitors - 582,000 foreign tourists visited Korea from Jan to Aug in 2021 (fell 94.9% compared to the same period in 2019, fell 74.3% compared to the same period in 2020)
 - 87,000 foreign tourists visited Korea in Aug 2021 (fell 94.5% compared to the same period in 2019, up 26.7% compared to the same period in 2020)

Korean outbound tourists - 639,000 Koreans visited overseas countries from Jan to Aug in 2021 (fell 96.8% compared to the same period in 2019, fell 83.9% compared to the same period in 2020)
 - 110,000 Koreans visited overseas countries in Aug 2021 (fell 95.5% compared to the same period in 2019, up 23.8% compared to the same period in 2020)



Source: Korea Culture and Tourism Institute (2021). Impact of COVID-19 on culture, tourism, and content industries in 2021

1. The impact of COVID-19 on tourism sector

The number of visitors to major tourist destinations in 2021 declined by about 50% year-on-year

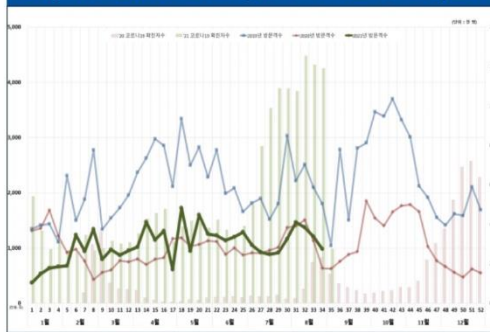
Visitors to major tourist destinations in Korea

- The number of visitors to major tourist destinations from Jan to Aug of 2021 was 37.06 million (fell 50.4% compared to the same period in 2019, up 4.3% compared to the same period in 2020)
- The number of visitors to major tourist destinations in Aug 2021 was 5.47 million (fell 41.6% compared to the same period in 2019, up 7.1% compared to the same period in 2020)

Number of domestic passenger flights in Korea

- The number of domestic passenger flights operated from Jan to Aug of 2021 was 137,063 flights (up 5.3% compared to the same period in 2019, up 25.1% compared to the same period in 2020)
- The number of domestic passenger flights operated in August 2021 was 18,043 flights (up 4.9% compared to the same period in 2019, fell 0.7% compared to the same period in 2020)

Changes in the number of visitors to major destinations in Korea (Jan to Aug 2021)



Changes in the number of domestic passenger flights in Korea (Jan to Aug 2021)



Source: Korea Culture and Tourism Institute (2021). Impact of COVID-19 on culture, tourism, and content industries in 2021

02

Prospects of changes in the tourism environment

2. Prospects of changes in the tourism environment

06

» Crisis and opportunities brought by COVID-19

S

- Having **experience of tourism recovery** from past crises
- **Domestic tourism** serves as a **buffer** against international tourism
- **Government support** for the **tourism industry**

W

- **Severe downturn** in the **aviation industry**
- Unprecedented **crisis** (Lack of lessons learned from previous experiences)
- Perception that **travel can be risky** may increase

O

- Opportunity to reconsider **business models**
- **Innovation** and **digitization**
- Emergence of tourism aiming for **Sustainability** (Rural, Nature, Health, etc.)

T

- **Unfavorable economic environment** (global recession, increased unemployment, etc.)
- **Uncertainties in vaccination**
- **'New Normal'** of unknown type

Source: Adapted from "UNWTO World Tourism Barometer May 2020 – Special focus on the Impact of COVID-19"

2. Prospects of changes in the tourism environment

07

1 Safe mobility

Restoring and maintaining travel confidence

2 Crisis management

Minimizing the impact of future crises affecting tourism

3 Resilience

Preparing a solid and stable foundation for tourism industry in uncertain times

4 Inclusiveness

Participation of the local community and expansion of tourism benefits

5 Green transformation

Tourism management to maintain the global and local environment

6 Digital transition

Creating an environment where all stakeholders can fully harness digital opportunities

7 Investment and Infrastructure

Focusing resources on a sustainable future of tourism

Source: OECD(2021.5). Adapted from "G20 Rome Guidelines for the Future of Tourism"

2. Prospects of changes in the tourism environment 07



1 Safe mobility
Restoring and maintaining travel confidence

2 Crisis management
Minimizing the impact of future crises affecting tourism

3 Resilience
Preparing a solid and stable foundation for tourism industry in uncertain times

4 Inclusiveness
Participation of the local community and expansion of tourism benefits

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Creating an environment where all stakeholders can fully harness digital opportunities

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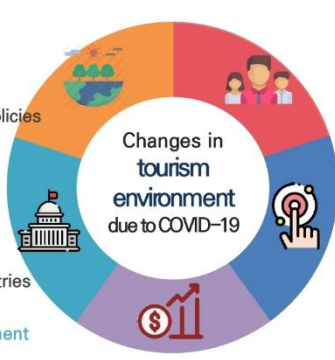
2. Prospects of changes in the tourism environment 08

✓ Environmental sector

- Emergence of **sustainable** tourism
- Increasing demand for carbon-neutral policies in dealing with climate changes

✓ Political sector

- Strengthening cooperation between countries for **safe tourism exchange**
- Establishing cross-border **crisis management** governance



Changes in tourism environment due to COVID-19

✓ Social sector

- Growing interest in personal hygiene and safety
- Widening the gap in tourism enjoyment and consumption between classes

✓ Technological sector

- **Digital transformation** in tourism industry
- Changes in the structure of the tourism industry based on **platform**

✓ Economic sector

- Sluggish global economic growth
- Growing demand for **innovative growth** including new business models for tourism companies

Source: Hyun Ju Kim, Kyung-Eun Choi, Donghyun Kim & Heeja An(2021), Adapted from "A Study on the Formulation of the Sixth National Tourism Promotion Plan (2023-2027)", Korea Culture and Tourism Institute. Hyun Ju Kim et al.(2020), Adapted from "Impact of COVID-19 on Tourism Industry and Policy Responses", Korea Culture and Tourism Institute.

03

The direction of tourism policy in the post-COVID-19 era

3. The direction of tourism policy in the post-COVID-19

After going through the crisis caused by an infectious disease, COVID-19, the basis of future tourism policy is to highlight **the multifaceted value orientation of growth, sustainability, and inclusiveness based on innovation.**



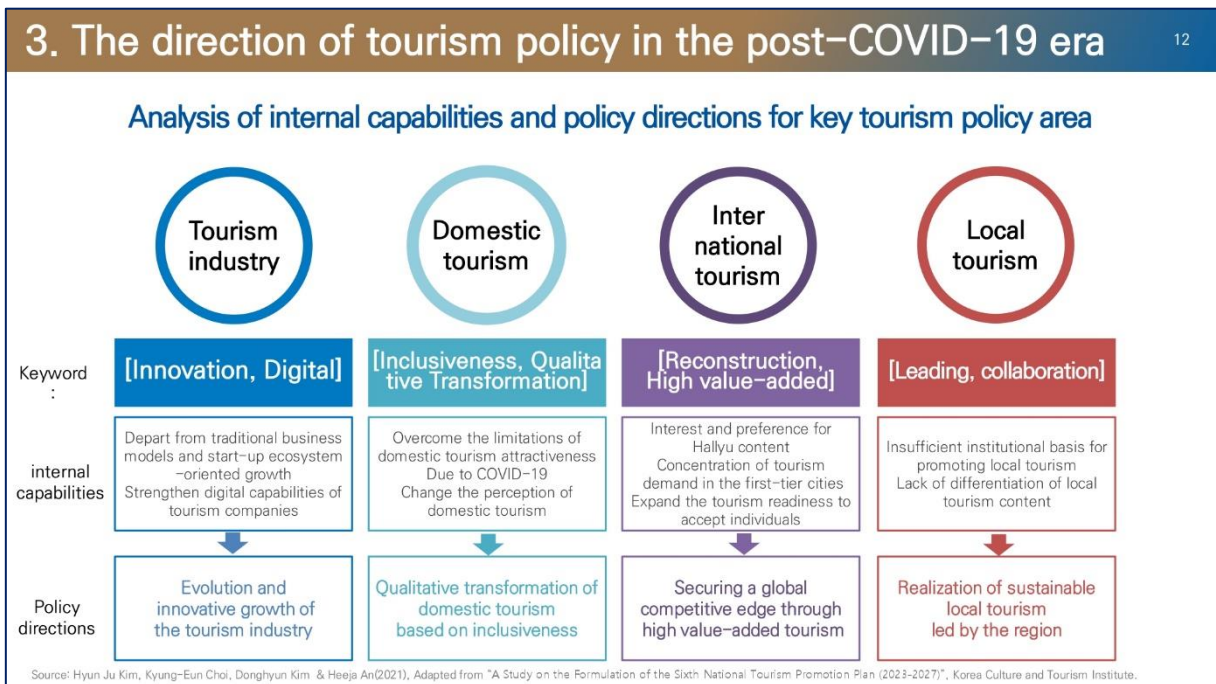
Source: Hyun Ju Kim, Kyung-Eun Choi, Donghyun Kim & Heeja An(2021). Adapted from "A Study on the Formulation of the Sixth National Tourism Promotion Plan (2023-2027)", Korea Culture and Tourism Institute.

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SWOT analysis for setting the direction of tourism policy

		Internal competency	
		Strength	Weakness
External environment and conditions		[S1] Increased interest and preference for Hallyu contents such as BTS and Squid Game [S2] Policy project promotion for implementing region-driven tourism policies (Korean DMO, Tour Dure, etc.)	[W1] Size of tourism companies, lack of digital capabilities [W2] Limitations of attractiveness of domestic tourism [W3] High demand for tourism focused on tier 1 cities in Korea [W4] Lack of tourism readiness and content for individual tourists
Opportunity	[O1] Increasing possibility of gradual resumption of international tourism exchange [O2] Transfer of central government authority to local governments [O3] Accelerating technological development including digital transformation [O4] Increasing demand for climate change response such as carbon neutrality	[SO Strategy] Take advantage of strength-based opportunities [SO1] Reorganizing policy implementation system to prepare for the resumption of safe international tourism exchanges [SO2] Establishing an institutional basis for promoting region-driven tourism policies	[WO Strategy] Taking advantage of opportunities to supplement weaknesses [WO1] Strengthening the digital capabilities of the tourism industry and establishing an innovative ecosystem [WO2] Responding to future climate environment changes including carbon neutrality
	Threat	[T1] Increased threat of periodic outbreaks of infectious diseases [T2] Intensifying competition among countries to attract tourists [T3] Concerns over domestic tourism demand to be reduced due to increased demand for overseas travel during the recovery phase of the tourism market [T4] Deepening the tourism gap between classes and regions	[ST Strategy] Responding to strengthen-based threat [ST1] Laying the foundation for international cooperation for tourism crisis management [ST2] Creating a tourism environment for all that embraces the tourism vulnerable

Source: Hyun Ju Kim, Kyung-Eun Choi, Donghyun Kim & Heeja An(2021), Adapted from "A Study on the Formulation of the Sixth National Tourism Promotion Plan (2023-2027)", Korea Culture and Tourism Institute.



3. The direction of tourism policy in the post-COVID-19 era

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1 Leaping to an advanced country in tourism with the evolution and innovation of the tourism industry

- Strengthening the digital competitiveness of the tourism industry to respond to the acceleration of technological innovation in the post-Covid-19 era
 - Providing policy support to enable major players in the tourism ecosystem to lead in accepting the changes in tourism-related technologies and information after COVID-19
- Discovering new business models in the tourism industry and build an innovative ecosystem
 - Expanding R&D support to strengthen innovation capabilities of tourism companies, and creating an innovative ecosystem for tourism industry
- Establishing tourism industry roadmap to respond to future climate environment changes including carbon neutrality

Digital transformation in tourism industry



Discover business models



Create innovative ecosystem for tourism industry

Foster startups	Discover business models	Diversify policy finance	Tourism R&D	Industry, academia, and government collaboration
• Lay the foundation for nurturing startups such as unicorn companies in the tourism sector	• Discover business models for the tourism industry and expand patents	• Diversify policy finance including project finance investment and loan system introduction	• Establish R&D system considering the nature of each type of tourism industry	• Operate program to strengthen innovative capabilities with industry, academia, and government collaboration

3. The direction of tourism policy in the post-COVID-19 era

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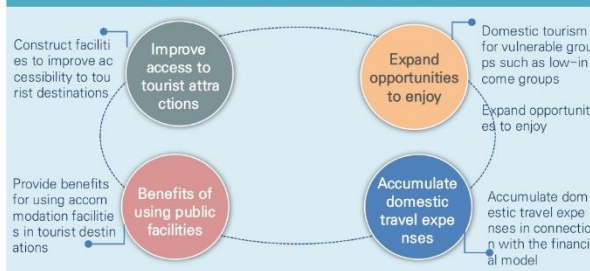
2 Qualitative transformation of domestic tourism based on inclusiveness

- Prepare a development model for existing policies and discover new policy tools to improve the quality of the people's tourism experience
 - Review the introduction of the national travel safe system, such as promoting the worker vacation support project 2.0 and accumulating domestic travel expenses in connection with the financial model
- Support for domestic tourism activities that everyone can enjoy
 - Improve access to domestic tourism for vulnerable groups such as open tourist destinations and open tourist cities
 - Expand opportunities to enjoy domestic tourism for children, adolescents and the elderly in low-income families
- Raise tourist awareness for responsible tourism, and prepare a system to reduce carbon dioxide in tourist destinations and tourist facilities

Promotion of worker vacation support project 2.0



Domestic tourism that everyone can enjoy



Responsible tourism



3. The direction of tourism policy in the post-COVID-19 era

3 Securing a global competitive edge through high value-added tourism to Korea

- Reorganizing policy implementation system to prepare for the resumption of safe international tourism exchanges
 - Reorganizing tourism readiness including immigration, such as vaccine passports and visas, and resumption of flight operations, and establishing international tourism reconstruction strategies and roadmaps
- Promote high value-added inbound tourism in Korea and in connection with local tourism
 - Convergence with other industries to expand the tourism industry, and discover high value-added tourism content to secure future growth engines
 - Promote local visits and stays of foreign tourists visiting Korea
- Strengthening the international tourism cooperation network and foundation in preparation for the tourism crisis



3. The direction of tourism policy in the post-COVID-19 era

4 Realization of sustainable local tourism led by the region

- Laying the foundation to promote **region-driven tourism policy**
 - **Establish an institutional basis** for local tourism promotion entities, capacity building, and **local tourism policy promotion** (expanding related policies such as Korean DMO)
 - Expand **local tourism cooperation governance**
- **Enhancing the attractiveness of local tourism and competitiveness of tourism services**
 - Lay the foundation for attractive local tourism products, supporting branding of local tourism destinations, etc.
 - Improve local tourism service quality based on global standards



