

Will travelling ever be the same again?

By Emily Chesson, Intern, Centre for Brexit Studies

It's no surprise that the travel industry has experienced a global plummet as a result of COVID-19. As we know, when lockdown was first announced back in March, we were unsure of what impact staying indoors for the foreseeable future was going to have on sectors and industries across the world.

The travel industry was forced to come to a total halt, in order to attempt to stop the virus' international spread. Billions of pounds has been wasted, companies are struggling to sort rebooking and reimbursements of holidays, many within the sector have lost their job and no one truly knows what the future holds for the industry.

Earlier this month, an extensive list of countries reopened their corridors to allow greater tourist flow in popular holiday destinations, meaning that many Brits would still have a chance to enjoy a summer holiday after a mediocre first half of 2020. Some of these countries include Spain, Germany, France and even Italy, who was hit particularly badly from COVID-19 at the start of March.

For these countries, Britons will not be expected to quarantine for two weeks on return to the UK. But having said this, there are many European countries that do not fit into this quarantine-free category, including Cyprus. At present, Cyprus has not opened its borders to Brits, potentially putting a lot of people off venturing there since they may only be allowed in the confines of their hotel room whilst away – and that's hardly a holiday.

These 'corridors' are being put in place to help the industry, as well as boosting the economy, after experiencing a tremendous blow from COVID-19. Thousands have already been made redundant from big travel companies, including Virgin. Not only has Virgin already received backlash for furloughing their staff, but they then received even more criticism when their furlough period was extended whilst job cuts continued. This, in my opinion, created a further shock to the public as Richard Branson has always appeared to focus on staff morale, but this has not been as apparent in the midst of COVID-19 with the best interests of Virgin staff not being considered. Clearly, even the very best staff focused companies can be thrown into disarray when a pandemic happens.

The likes of EasyJet are also set to cut 4,500 jobs, whilst TUI are desperately trying to get their planes off the tarmac and flying to locations that would normally be packed with holidaymakers by now. As many companies are following suit with huge job losses, unemployment rates are likely to increase significantly, being extremely detrimental on the UK economy. As more individuals lose their jobs, in turn consumer spending will inevitably reduce, which will cause demand for holidays to fall, leading to a further downfall in the economy. It's a vicious cycle that we're nowhere near the end of.

Holiday prices are expected to rocket, in the hope that the travel industry can recover from this very difficult year. However, since the industry, and the rest of the world, has been put on hold for so long, people are now, understandably, hesitant to travel, or do not have the money to do so. Also, social distancing measures on places and other practices will most likely deter travellers too. It is still uncertain when a vaccine will be secured and, until then, I unfortunately can't see a lot of people wanting to leave the country.

This all being said, when comparing identical holidays in Cyprus in August 2020 and 2021 (based on the same hotel, flight and dates), the prices surprisingly barely differ. The cost in 2020 is £1034pp, compared to £1118pp in 2021. So perhaps it is too early to really be able to tell how coronavirus will affect future holiday prices.

It is clear that people are favouring domestic travel and 'staycations', to avoid the risks of travelling abroad and on planes. However, this poses its own problems. Places like Devon and Cornwall will get completely booked up and accommodation is few and far between. Airbnb rental prices in the UK are expected to double or even quadruple due to the lack of income during the pandemic from those who own the properties, and the extra costs incurred as cleaning budgets increase.

I can, of course, understand why people would want some time away after a disastrous start to 2020, but I can also understand why people would prioritise staying in the UK. The travel restrictions have impacted my year too, as I had been looking forward to a cruise around the Caribbean with my family to celebrate my 21st birthday and graduation. However, understandably, that got cancelled. Luckily, I have been able to rebook for next year at no extra cost.

An aspect of travel that I never considered to be struggling was holidaying around the UK, something that used to be so easy to do. I also had a summer holiday booked to Cornwall, again, with my family. However, the accommodation made the decision to cancel our booking, since they wanted to use the house to self-isolate themselves. I am disappointed as this was my only other chance to get away, but I will continue to look for other 'staycations' around the UK, and hopefully one day soon, I'll be able to enjoy a change of view for a few days.

It seems like personal preference and good old common sense are the biggest factors here when it comes to travel. Many of us will take the risk, but many simply won't. How will travel companies survive with half empty planes? How will hotels cope with this going forward, if they can't afford to pay their staff? How will coach companies, which would normally be ferrying people across the UK and Europe by now in the year, last and still be here next year?

It's a hugely worrying time for the sector, and domestic travel has probably been hit to a greater extent than people would care to think adding huge uncertainty to the UK economy. We all hope that the British economy will continue to re-build, and will revitalise the travel industry.