

How can international events survive without travel?

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As we know, for the travel industry to survive, customers and employees need to feel safe in order to travel again. Now that restrictions are being lifted across the world, and we are once again able to spend a week or two abroad, how soon will we all start to do so? With many of us still being, reasonably, worried about travelling again whilst Covid-19 is still claiming thousands of lives, how can the likes of worldwide events and conferences still go ahead?

According to *globelwebindex* (1) only 31% of consumers globally say they'll trust their government's advice on when it will be safe to travel again, showing that although many of us will be keen to jump on a plane and jet off somewhere different from our own homes even just for a few days, there will be many who won't feel ready to do so for months yet, maybe even years.

Looking at the event industry globally, currently, the vast majority of events have either been cancelled or postponed until 2021. For example, Dubai's global event 'EXPO 2020' has been postponed until October 2021. The delay, of course, allows organisers to safely navigate the impact of COVID-19, and allows the World Expo to focus on a collective desire for new thinking to identify solutions to arguably one of the greatest challenges of our time (2).

The uncertainty surrounding travel across the globe, including how long people will have to quarantine before or after their travels, leaves the event industry incredibly unpredictable. Will events like EXPO 2020 still be able to deliver on the postponed date? And more importantly, will people even still want to attend, if it means travelling there?

Last week, it was announced that New York's theatre streets of Broadway have cancelled all their shows until 2021, losing around \$35 million per week. Shows on Broadway grossed \$1.8 billion last season, attracting a record 15 million people across the globe. Places like Broadway and the West End have suffered massively from the pandemic, losing out on attendees that would normally travel from countries around the world to see these shows. President of the League, Charlotte St. Martin, claimed that we cannot socially distance within theatres with the present financial models we have (3). Despite Chancellor Rishi Sunak's cash injection to the arts industry this week, it is still unknown when theatres will be able to reopen, and if it will ever be safe to do so.

Birmingham's Commonwealth Games in 2022 will create income for both local and large businesses. However, despite it being two years away, the ongoing pandemic has created 'serious risk' towards the funding of the event (4). According to Liam Byrne, MP for Birmingham Hodge Hill and West Midlands Mayoral Candidate, the crisis has cost the city council over £164 million. To prevent any revenue losses for the Games, it will be crucial for both national and international audiences to travel to attend.

Of course, by now in the year, holiday packages would be in true swing, with many of us jetting off with our friends and family for a few weeks of fun. But during the crisis, attractions such as Disneyworld in Florida and Lapland have had to shut their doors. Without tourists, these places, and their staff, simply do not work. According to the Disneyworld website, parks will start opening back up from the July 14th, with safety measures in place (5).

Many attractions, especially those that rely heavily on tourism, such as family friendly destinations and city break locations, could cease to exist if people do not book and want to go there until more questions have been answered.

Statistics show that nearly a third of younger people said they'll only travel again once they feel secure in their job and finances, showing that many of us who could be at risk of redundancy or a pay cut simply won't consider spending huge amounts of money on holidays yet.

Meanwhile, only 18% of 'frequent travellers', aged between 55-64, are concerned about finances in future travel planning. This suggests that younger generations are willing to travel again but worry about the financial steps to afford a holiday, whilst being less concerned about health and safety when it comes to travelling, in comparison to older, vulnerable passengers.

According to Forbes, (6) travel and tourism account for 1 in 10 jobs worldwide. That includes the many jobs that rely solely on travel, including holiday representatives, airline staff, tour operators and many more that will have suffered massively from the pandemic and are unaware of their future job role in this industry. The likes of TUI, Ryanair and Jet2 have been offering 'credit notes' to customers who were expected to have gone on holiday, in the hope that many customers will go on to use their credit notes and book a holiday soon. But with so many people wanting to stay home this year, how long can these companies continue to survive?

If large-scale international events have any hope of taking place later this year, or even next year, the travel industry needs to bounce back in a big way sooner rather than later. Travel is by far one of the most important aspects of the events industry, let us hope this crisis will serve as a reminder for all to realise the importance and appreciation for travel again.

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