



Quick Tips from our Quick Chat

*A discussion on surviving COVID-19
in the travel industry*

We've compiled a small document of tips and advice from our open discussion on surviving COVID-19 in the travel industry. We hope that you find it useful and that it helps to keep you afloat - or, dare to dream, thriving - during these trying times. If you have any questions or additions, please reach out to us at marketing@tourismtiger.com.

How long do you think it will be until things improve?

It is impossible to say with certainty how long this will last. However, if we consider the experience in Asia, there are a few things we can hope for. China has begun re-opening provinces two months after Wuhan went into lockdown, with even Wuhan re-opening at the beginning of April and parts of the Great Wall of China as well. If we base other lockdowns on this, we should assume that it will be a slow summer, but not an empty one.

The issue is international and long-distance travel. There may be residual fear, economic disadvantage, and long-term border closures. Therefore, we suggest planning to market your tours to locals. This might be in the form of a staycation or people looking for a fun afternoon rather than a trip of any kind. It is safe to assume that your locals will be looking for something to do once they are able to leave quarantine.

The takeaway: keep an eye on Asia in the next couple of months and make your plans based on how their market recovers

What refund policy is most common right now? If our clients purchased travel insurance before this pandemic will it help them at all?

The most successful policies we have seen have involved offering gift certificates or vouchers to customers unable to make their trip. It's important for many people to support small businesses, especially now. This might involve providing an advantage to customers who reschedule rather than cancel, such as supplying an extra stop on your tour or free merchandise. These incentives also work for encouraging people to pay deposits now for future travel.

Another alternative is a partial refund. Customers will be able to understand why certain aspects of

your product or service, such as pre-purchased theater tickets, are not refundable. Explaining why or how things are being refunded is a great way to maintain that customer rapport.

Finally, plan for the future. Introduce a more lenient policy for the possibility that this may happen again. This might be in the form of a refund that includes a cancellation fee to ensure that both parties are happy. Just make sure to put these new policies on your website!

Are you doing anything unique to retain your guides while the industry is “shut down”?

Some people are assigning tasks to different guides, e.g. Tim solicits reviews, Immie manages social media. That way business improves, everyone has a stake in it and people feel useful. You're also paying people to work on your business, rather than paying them while they do nothing.

Another thing you can do is check out local government stimulus packages. While it is unfortunate to have to let people go during this time, it is a way to stay in business so that they have a job when tourists return. The UK government offered 80% wage subsidies for staff kept on by employers last week and this week they have announced a similar scheme for the self-employed who can claim up to 80% of their average monthly salary. Unemployed workers can apply for Universal Credit but long waits have been reported (2-hour phone calls).

The Australian government recently passed an AU\$84 billion stimulus package for students, sole-traders, self-employed, casually employed, contract workers, job seekers, pensioners, and carers. This is on top of the \$550 per fortnight Coronavirus supplement. While many people will be eligible for this, it will not be distributed until after April 27th. Like the UK, online and telephone lines are overwhelmed, most (if not all) Centrelink (social welfare) offices have long lines out the front.

Any tips to reduce expenses while not receiving sales income?

Firstly, reduce your spending on marketing campaigns, take down your paid marketing on platforms such as Facebook and Google. It's a waste of money at a time when people cannot travel. Check out and sign the [Arival petition](#) to call on Google and Facebook to credit the accounts of all tour and activity operators, attractions, experience hosts, ground transfer providers, and third-party resellers for advertising spent on their platforms for the period January 15 to March 15, 2020.

Review your accounting, it's very likely that money you previously budgeted for is not being used at the moment, for example, travel expenses or maintenance costs. Put that money aside or use it for something more urgent.

Again, check out your government's stimulus packages, many countries around the world are bringing in support packages for the self-employed.

How can we confirm and book clients for early fall or strategize to have them reschedule instead of cancel?

Encourage gift cards instead of a refund. This way you will be able to keep the money and they will still have an experience to look forward to. You can also modify trips to give people extras on the basis that they reschedule instead of cancel. For example, give them freebies or additional credit.

You should also be active on social media to give people something to aspire to. That way, when they do start traveling again, they will think of you. If you wait until tourism resumes before you start marketing, it will be too late. They will already have locations and tours in mind.

What alternative revenue streams could we come up with? Maybe something to sell online while people are at home?

What would be the best plan or tactic for the upcoming new wave of virus, with the idea of making "quick money" in a short period of time, to face this new "reality"?

These questions were similar so we've grouped them together here.

1. Focus on your expertise! If you do architecture tours, do online tutorials or chats about architecture. If you give cooking classes, let people do them over the internet. If you do tours of Versailles, offer courses on the French Revolution. You can also use your existing photos and videos to put together a virtual tour. While most virtual tours are offered for free, you could include a [Patreon link](#). People are feeling empathetic at the moment so they are trying to be generous tippers nowadays.

2. Do you have any swag that you give away or sell? Something like a funny shirt that your guides wear, something with a logo, anything at all. Put it on your website and social media as being for sale. Postal services are still operating.

3. Reach out to people in virtual travel groups or your own social media - get them excited about traveling in the future and get them to pay a deposit now. There are new groups forming just to look at dream vacation spots and many old groups are transforming to include these virtual tours rather than advice about live tours.

Send them your virtual tour, or your website or social media full of dream-worthy photos and get them excited about your tours or activities. Then get them to buy gift cards or pay a deposit on their future tour. There are a couple of cool ways to do this. One popular way is to offer people more than they spend. Say someone buys a gift card for \$50, give them an \$80 credit. You could even do this without money (though time is money), by giving them something extra on the tour. Instead of your usual 4-stop food tour, they'll get a 5th stop. Or throw in a free shirt or keychain if that's something you have for sale.

[The Hideout in Chicago](#) had an interesting way of doing this. They had local artists create their gift cards. People paid \$25, the artist got \$5, the bar got \$20, and they'll get \$20 in drinks when the bar reopens.

4. People love unique stuff and snarky memes are gold, especially in troubled times. Work with an artist to create a meme-y shirt about a tour being canceled or something. It's a cliché to have a shirt that says "My Roman tour was canceled and all I got was this stupid t-shirt," but it's a cliché for a reason. People buy them. Work with local artists you know, find someone out of work posting in local Facebook groups, or go on fiver. It's the perfect time to seek out partners for your business.

Tread carefully with this one. People are happy to share memes with friends and family, but they may not be ready to wear one publicly.

5. Paid newsletters need to be outstanding or very popular to work, but you could create one for your area or do a one-off ebook. [Lost Lake in Chicago](#) did this well by talking about their staff and giving information relevant to their business. In their case it's recipes, but you could do fun historical facts, wine pairings for quarantine snacks, first-person videos of your rafting tours, photos of your escape room where they have to figure out the clues.

6. **Some companies** are using their resources to deliver groceries and essential products to those who are unable to get out of their homes. If you have vehicles and a team this could be something to look into, even if just volunteering it could do well for your brand.

Do you have any advice for a start-up or new business?

We have a document with our best advice for new businesses. Check out our [SEO section](#) and then sign up for the full document with tips on social media, blogging, marketing, and more.

Our founder, Mat Newton, has a great book about [how to sell more tours](#). It is full of advice and resources for people just starting out.

[Tour Operators United](#) is our Facebook group. There are over 11,000 (helpful and friendly!) tour operators in that group sharing advice daily. You can ask questions or just read and get a feel for what is happening in the tourism industry.

Similarly, there are a number of associations that you can join that would be able to provide you with more personalized advice based on the type of tour company that you're looking to start or the country/region/city you want to work in. Search social media and blogs that might be relevant to you, or look at similar businesses and competitors, and see what is working and what isn't.

If you're looking for more advice, check out [our blog](#). It is updated twice weekly (daily while we recover from the coronavirus's devastating impact on tourism).