

PACIFIC STORYTELLING REPORT FOR DESTINATION QUEENSTOWN MOUNTAIN TRAVEL SYMPOSIUM APRIL 2021

Key Items

- Item 1 – Executive Summary
- Item 2 – Opening Session
- Item 3 – Closing Session
- Item 3 – Notes from Scheduled Meetings

Item 1: Executive Summary

Mountain Travel Symposium took place over Tuesday, April 13, 2021 - Saturday, April 17, 2021 with a total of 600 participants for this virtual event.

The focus of this year's symposium has been largely centred around the US and Canadian resort experience and how to cope amongst a pandemic as opposed to New Zealand who has operated without Covid-19 in the community at large. As New Zealand opens gradually to the rest of the world it is important to learn from the international experience in relation to how to promote, how to operate and how to keep the trust of our local community.

Future dates have been confirmed as
2022 - April 3-8, | Vail CO
2023, March 26 – April 1, | Banff & Lake Louise, AB, Canada

Item 2 – Opening General Session & Industry Update

Tuesday, April 13, 2021 2:30 AM to 4:30 AM

<https://youtu.be/JX6eyVRFMiI>

Session 1:

MTS sat down with data and research experts from Destimetrics, Phocuswright, RRC and STR to understand the state of the travel and mountain tourism industry with new statistics, insights and outlooks about how the mountain tourism industry fared for the 20/21 season, what that means in the here and now, and what we can anticipate for the '21 summer season and beyond.

- Dave Belin, Director of Consulting Services, RRC Associates
- Pete Comeau, Managing Director, Phocuswright

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- Tom Foley, Senior Vice President of Business Process and Analytics, Inntopia
- Ali Hoyt, Senior Director, Consulting and Analytics, STR

We have seen business and destinations increase their concentration on maintaining a high level of service in a post covid world to maintain consumer confidence to book and that their health and safety will be paramount.

Uncrowded nature of destinations will play a large part in attracting visitors, this is a all of industry piece of work from the destination being highly aware of pressure points and potential bottlenecks, hotels with flexible cancellation policies.

Prior to pandemic global travel bookings starting to slow even before 2020. It will take a while but 2021 will see signs of recovery but will take till 2025 that we get back to 2019 levels of bookings.

Amid lockdowns online bookings were a significant part of the total mix making up \$699B in 2019 about half of travel all bookings. Online bookings were less affected than most other channels falling -20% when the rest of the industry fell by over -60%. People have turned to digital channels to purchase retail goods and travel goods as well feeling that a digital transaction is safer than an in-person transaction. Online bookings are expected to surpass 2019 levels in 2024.

More of the US resorts are seeing recovery due to the domestic tourism demand rebounding especially since vaccine rollouts. In 2021 US resorts are forecasting a +20% increase on 2020 booking levels (however this is off the back of a -40% decrease in 2020) RevPAR not expected to reach 2019 levels until 2025 however rates are only down -9.8%, holding rates is helping to yield pax better and has been a vital part for the industry to protect their businesses.

Long term trend amongst US resorts is a change in the market peaks and the valleys, Sunday – Tuesday arrivals are up compared to a year ago. Friday arrivals are down. Net result of this change in arrival patterns means a net smoothing of the peaks and valleys which has potential to impact supply lines but is reflective of travelers' virtual employment and is likely to continue.

On the slopes, many resorts had to implement capacity restrictions for parking, ski lifts and amenities to adhere to health protocols, most suppliers are still reporting strong ski visits including increases in midweek and night skiing however fields who have relied largely on international markets have taken longer to recover.

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Session 2: Sponsored by Expedia

A discussion about what has been learned throughout this once-in-a-career experience, what is required to maintain safety and business success moving forward, and how the industry can ban together for future prosperity.

- Barrett Fisher, President & CEO, Tourism Whistler
- Kris McKinnon, Managing Director, Sales & Business Development, East West Hospitality
- Kelly Pawlak, President & CEO, NSAA
- Sally Smith, Senior Director of Market Management, Expedia Group

Communication oriented campaigns such as [Ski Well, Be Well](#) helped inform skiers about what was expected of them on the slopes and in mountain communities.

Season Ski Pass marketplace grew to 45% of total visiting skiers and likely that season passholder utilization to increasing for the next year.

Vail resorts reduced their amount of season passes by -20% putting pressure on other ski areas. Magic Mountain in Vermont have planned on putting a cap on the number of season passes that they are selling this winter with the intention to limit the number of people on the mountain. Capping the amount of season pass holders is seen as an obvious way to increase customer satisfaction and safety. A trend to keep your eye on moving forward.

A lot of new types of skiers became ski enthusiasts over the course of the pandemic, specifically a younger and more diverse ski base than ever before. New types of skiers skew younger, female and slightly lower household incomes than traditional outdoor ski participants. Same trend can be seen in biking and hiking.

Utilizing technology such as text message alerts, advance purchasing of tickets, cashless transactions, QR codes as well as midweek ski interest growth are going to be a consistent theme moving forward. A lot of these technology and innovations are better service to begin with an most will stay around post pandemic.

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There is an opportunity to increase lift ticket prices as a way to limit ski numbers. Dynamic pricing is something they many were forced to implement this winter and as a result pushed people in to trying midweek and night skiing and this is likely to continue.

A lot of pent-up demand that Americans have saved more than they ever have if they remained employed, saving over \$1.7 trillion in 2020.

Hotel company clean stay programs and partnerships with cleaning companies like Clorox etc are also here to stay.

Travel agents remain an important part of the ecosystem to counter the disinformation that is out there as regards to tourism. We should see the trade continue to be a valuable channel to assist with the changing conditions of travel i.e. testing, vaccinations, and other restrictions.

Suppliers should consider implementing flexibility of booking conditions and flexible cancellation policies long term to provide consumer confidence, most of the suppliers who have implemented flexible policies have in fact seen better bookings than those without. It is important to provide written terms and conditions for guests to feel certain enough to book and cut down on the call volumes to reservations teams.

The National Ski Areas association used geo-technology to reduce people to people contact and made it easier for guests to make a reservation giving them peace of mind, access to parking sports, access to a seat in a restaurant and allowed better planning of staff levels and supplier of operators. More investment in these types of booking technology is needed moving forward.

When reopening to domestic market Tourism Whistler found it import to coordinated resort wide efforts, integrating experiences and accommodation to stop duplication of effort. Crisis communications handled by the council with Tourism Whistler taking the lead for visitor comms, and support with media enquiries.

Trip protection, insurance, refunds, and flexible cancellations help visitors feel more confident to book and should not be underestimated.

61% of families in America are said to have had a flex vacation, meaning that while parents are working from home and children being in virtual school families are taking advantage of the flexibility and having a family vacation.

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Length of stay patterns have changed and over the USA winter saw an increase from 5.2 – 6.4 nights with the domestic market and no international visitors.

Tourism whistler 2020 campaign – [Adventure Differently](#), focused on reduced capacity, the need for face masks and respecting locals and being patient. 2021 the campaign of Whistler will move to refocus on ‘Adventure Deeply.’ Realizing that international markets will be closed for most of 2021 Whistler will also focus on longer more meaningful stays and midweek specials to attract a more sustainable slow traveler who engages with the destination more deeply.

Over the pandemic Hotels and accommodation sector saw increase in phone call enquiries when historically they have been trending down. By adding thorough content and FAQs they could get the right information out and reduce the resourcing of frontline teams.

Interestingly net promoter scores for NSAA are increasing with all the changes implemented, less crowding on the slopes creates a more wide-open feeling, attitude of gratitude of customers, and improved technology has enabled a more seamless experience.

Item 3 – Closing Session

Thursday, April 15, 2021 6:00 AM to 9:00 AM

<https://youtu.be/Br4MxWu1nOE>

Are Extended Stays Here to Stay? And Other Lodging Questions Answered

COVID-19 has changed the lodging landscape in the short term. This session looked at what changes are here to stay for the long term. Discussion about the longevity of long-term stays, housekeeping protocols, contactless technology, reservation patterns and other new trends.

- Toby Babich, President, Vacation Rentals Management Association
- George Meshkov, National Sales Manager, Generali Global Assistance
- Bob Milne, Chief Operations Officer, Vacasa

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- Kimberley Wall, Manager, Tour and Leisure Sales and Market Development - Canada's Western Mountain Region, Fairmont Hotels & Resorts

It is important for accommodation providers to remember that guest servicing starts before the traveler books. Consumers must feel comfortable enough to book firstly especially when their own personal health is uncertain. Flexible cancellation policies and articulating the cleaning and hygiene procedures helps to reassure customers. The education of the consumer and showing them with what to expect on property is important for the health and safety of guests but also of the local communities in which we operate.

The industry must not let their guard down with the hygiene protocols as we anticipate that we will still need these protocols moving forward for both consumer confidence but guest experience. Once restrictions are lifted do not get too comfortable as people may get more choices about where they go on vacation as different countries open up again.

From a sustainability point of view some of the learnings that we want to take into the future include, the removal of buffets has resulted in a lot less food waste, QR code digital menus allow dynamic pricing and up to date information while helping reduce paper waste.

Turning Mayhem into Organizational Transformation

Utilizing data and insights is a valuable opportunity. We now have the technology to challenge our industry to measure the visitor economy, the resident sentiment and how our organizations make life better for those in our mountain communities.

- Josh Collins, Head of Community and Education, Zartico
- Scott Fortner, Executive Director, Visit Sun Valley
- Tony Lyle, Vice President, Tourism Development, Lake Tahoe Visitors Authority
- Mia Vlaar, Economic Development Director, Town of Vail

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What many destinations have found is that the traditional monthly statistics that are dated by the time of publication are no longer fit for purpose. Weekly flash polls are better than monthly stats to provide real time information to stakeholders and industry. Many have adopted more man on the street surveys of business and sharing out to the industry as a whole to act as a champion to assist parallel industries. As DMOs we must consider the question are we driving or shaping visitation? Because it is quite a short-term window of booking pattern.

There are several ways to understand visitor flows including tracking wifi system users and new geo-location technologies.

Remote working is here to say, it has worked for over a year with teams, and you have had to trust your staff to get the job done you cannot then say you do not trust your staff to not work remotely.

You can't have a campaign for three months anymore, you need to have your data available so you can change campaigns on a dime in case of changes in restrictions and market conditions.

We need to use this pandemic as an opportunity to think about how do we create a better environment across the board so small business can thrive, we need to support that in a way that goes beyond the traditional big attractions.

From the Base Up

The tourism industry has the unique opportunity to rebuild from a nearly clean slate. As we put the pieces back together, what do we want to keep, improve, and start anew? Reengineering our industry in a more equitable, sustainable, and socially accountable way.

- Jen Gureki, CEO, Coalition Snow

By 2042 minorities will become the majority, since 2000 Black Americans have seen an 114% increase in their buying power totaling \$115B in 2018. Asian Americans buying power grew to \$1T in 2018 and is the fastest minority market in the US with a buying power greater than the GDP of Turkey. The Latinx market includes 1 out of every 6 Americans and rising by 212% since 2000 and with a total buying power of \$1.5T.

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There is an assumption that minorities do not show up to mountain communities because they cannot afford it, when the main reason is because they don't see themselves represented in the outdoor industry, something to consider in our promotions moving forward.

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