

1 **Tourism during and after COVID-19: An Expert-informed Agenda for Future**
2 **Research**¹²

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36 **Abstract**

37 With the COVID-19 pandemic reaching a more mature, yet still threatening stage, the time is ripe to
38 look forward in order to identify the topics and trends that will shape future tourism research and
39 practice. This note sets out to develop an agenda for tourism research post COVID-19. We surveyed
40 several industry and academic experts seeking their opinion on three important questions: What
41 potential future topics are needed to address the impact of COVID-19? What existing research
42 areas/topics will become more relevant? What changes are recommended for data collection?
43 Interpreting and synthesizing the answers yields six focal research avenues that researchers should
44 devote more attention and effort to. For each topic, we present various important research questions
45 can experts have suggested. By doing so, this note paves the way and serves as a signpost for countless
46 intriguing future research endeavors that are of high relevance and demanded by the industry.

47 **Introduction**

48 Global tourism has been one of the most negatively impacted industries by COVID-19. Around the
49 globe, inbound and domestic travel has declined significantly. Hotels, entertainment, cruise lines and
50 other related sectors have seen their occupancy numbers take a massive hit. The tourism industry will
51 certainly bounce back, but COVID-19 is a shock like no other. The long-term impact of this crisis is
52 still unclear. Only those destinations and hotels that understand the new equilibrium at which tourism
53 will possibly settle (Kock et al. 2020a), will be able to position themselves well in a post-COVID-19
54 era, thereby paving the way for competitiveness and further growth. Given the unprecedented impact
55 of the pandemic on tourism, new and disruptive adaptations and innovations may find a very fertile
56 ground in this crisis.

57 Against this background, we believe that both researchers and industry leaders need to adapt new
58 strategies to speed up the recovery process of the industry and prepare for the future. This note aims
59 to address this need by providing an assessment of the current sentiment and reasoning of tourism
60 academia and practice. We surveyed 19 industry and reputable academic researchers around the globe,
61 seeking their expertise on three fundamental, forward-looking questions. We argue that such a stock-
62 check is both much needed and timely as we, after having digested the first shock (Zenker and Kock
63 2020), are gaining a stepwise more complete picture of the pandemic and its consequences, and thus
64 are better able to deduct and sketch the long-term implications. While COVID-19 presents
65 unprecedented challenges to tourism, and will likely do so for much longer, it is also an opportunity

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66 to launch new research endeavors that can have a potentially transformative impact on future tourism
67 research and practice. Carving out and articulating those topics through the expertise of both our
68 industry and research colleagues is the purpose of this study.

69 After having talked with colleagues and industry partners since the beginning of the pandemic (i.e.,
70 March 2020), we have identified the three following questions as being most diagnostic in eliciting
71 (post) COVID-19 topics:

- 72 1. What potential future topics are needed to address the impact of COVID-19?
- 73 2. What existing research areas/topics will become more relevant?
- 74 3. What changes are recommended for data collection? And which additional variables may be
75 required by future studies to provide more accuracy and robustness to their findings?

76 Based on the responses we collected, we identified several important research pillars and under each
77 of these pillars we identified several important research topics for future studies. We also highlighted
78 important criteria for future data collection in the field. As mentioned, the purpose of this note is to
79 set up a research agenda for future research in the field so that future studies can be more aligned
80 with new industry needs and trends.

81 **Methodology and Findings**

82 We approached and surveyed several industry and academic experts about the three questions. In
83 total, we obtained results from 19 experts⁶. When selecting and then approaching the individual
84 experts, we took their reputation and their research or management area into account. By doing so,
85 we established a broad and deep array of different informants, covering many research and
86 management areas.

87 There was a general agreement among the experts that the following areas would require more
88 attention as the industry positions itself post Covid-19: consumer behavior, demand and performance
89 modelling, forecasting, destination and facility management, information technology, and quality of
90 life. Under each of these headings the experts identified several important research questions which
91 we list in Table 1.

92 **1. Consumer behavior**

93 Experts are unambiguous that the implications for consumer behavior are substantive. Many have
94 highlighted that the impact of COVID-19 on behavior will be massive, and this view is shared by
95 recent research (Kock et al. 2020). One key narrative in the area of consumer behavior, and among
96 the main topics listed in Table 1, is the growing importance of safety, risk reduction, cleanliness,
97 reliability and threat anticipation. There is a need for better understanding the psychology of both
98 travelers and employees in order to understand changes in tourist behavior. Indeed, many of these
99 behaviors can be summarized as coping behaviors, that is, behaviors exerted to cope with the
100 short- and long-term threats of the pandemic. In addition, how local residents' attitude toward
101 tourism and crowding may shift following the pandemic, is also a vital research avenue. Experts
102 also highlighted the need to better understand changing travel patterns, such as a preference for
103 more rural and thus less crowded destinations. Lastly, the role of COVID-19 in driving

⁶ Initially, we reached out to 25 experts, but we only heard back from 19.

104 stereotyping, xenophobia and ethnocentrism, travel guilt, shame, and stigmatization is also of high
105 interest, for tourism but also far beyond.

106 **2. Demand and performance modelling**

107 In the area of demand and performance modelling, more research is needed to assess the effect
108 of COVID-19 on key performance indicators such as profitability, employment, salaries, and
109 other. At the destination level, the effect of COVID-19 on the socio-economic condition of the
110 destination can be of interest, along with its spatial effect for various geographic scales, such as
111 country, state/province, city, and sites.

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113 **3. Forecasting**

114 In the area of forecasting, the experts recommended more use of scenario forecasts using
115 judgmental and econometric methods. Forecasting tourism demand amid major public health
116 crises including COVID-19 can be of interest, and so is the forecasting of booking and others
117 trends based on big data, tourism portals and social media.

118 **4. Destination and Facility Management**

119 In the area of destination and facility planning, both industry and academic experts highlighted
120 the importance of developing strategies for hotels seeking to be redesigned into healthcare
121 facilities during COVID-19 or other related crises. As for destinations, experts call for new ways
122 to build resilient destinations. In addition, they highlight that destinations need to strengthen their
123 efforts in order to build loyalty and trust among tourists.

124 **5. Information Technology**

125 For information technology, the experts emphasized the even more important role that technology
126 will play post COVID-19. There is a need to test the impact of technological enhancement on
127 profitability, employment, safety and customer satisfaction. Exploring the role of cryptocurrencies
128 and blockchain in the context of international travel can also be of interest, and so are the roles of
129 digital media and e-tourism in shaping holiday experience. Importantly, colleagues highlight that
130 the pandemic may pave the way for a larger adoption of artificial intelligence technology to
131 enhance both internal processes and interactions with consumers.

132 **6. Quality of Life and Sustainability**

133 Finally, within the context of quality of life and sustainability, the experts emphasized the
134 importance of creating safe destinations for consumers, residents and employees. There is a need to
135 balance the interests of holidaymakers, tourists and local communities. Other issues of interest are
136 the growing importance of health tourism and the intelligent promotion of sustainable and
137 climate-friendly tourism products.

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139 ---Insert Table 1 about here---

140 Our third question asked experts to reflect on future trends on employed data collection methods and
141 analyses. The experts highlighted several important recommendations for data collection post
142 COVID-19. There was an agreement that the pandemic creates a need for new creative solutions to
143 data collection. Data collection should involve more face to face, focus groups and in depth interviews,
144 as surveys appear to be less reliable in the context of this pandemic. The experts believe that real data
145 on consumer behavior such as saving, expenditures, investment and travel could complement survey
146 data to provide more robust and accurate estimates. In addition, a considerable number of experts

147 wishes to see more data collections via experiment to test the causality between tourism
148 demand/choice and risk perception of public health crises. There is also a need to conduct repeated
149 studies within different contexts and longitudinal data to establish tourism phenomena beyond a
150 specific case or application. While having said that, experts also note that surveys are important to
151 continue during and after the pandemic because many, especially psychological phenomena, are latent
152 concepts and thus not catchable otherwise.

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155 **Concluding Remarks**

156 The goal of this note was to set up an agenda for tourism research post COVID-19. We surveyed
157 several industry and academic experts seeking their opinion on three important questions. Based on
158 the feedback and other related discussions we had with our experts we proposed an agenda for future
159 research focusing on six key pillars. Under each of these pillars we identified several important sub-
160 topics for future research to address. With all the uncertainties surrounding COVID-19, and the
161 negative effect it had on the industry, it is never timelier for academic experts to develop some more
162 courageous research ideas (Kock et al. 2020b), focusing on topics that connect better with the industry.
163 This note aimed to serve this specific purpose. The topics highlighted will guide future research on
164 the topic and will serve as an excellent guide for doctoral students.

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182 Table 1: Research pillars and questions extracted

Research Pillar	Topics of Interest
Consumer Behavior	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Understanding consumers' shifting preferences toward a destination's or provider's cleanliness, safety and reliability. 2. Developing a better understanding of the psychology of consumers and employees in order to understand their risk perceptions and coping behavior. 3. Testing the difference in consumer attitudes and behavior between Airbnb and hotels during and post Covid-19. 4. Using evolutionary psychology to understand and explain how disease threats, social isolation and economic recession stemming from the pandemic affect tourists in the short and long-term. 5. On the supply-side, COVID-19 has incited innovation to limit the spread of the disease and to provide experiences that feel safe for the tourist. Research is needed to evaluate the effectiveness of various strategies and initiatives, but also to more fundamentally incite and assist the tourism industry in transforming and re-imagining tourism experiences. 6. Examining the impacts of local, regional or national governmental health regulations on tourists' and residents' attitudes towards tourism. 7. Measuring travel guilt and shame, and stigmatization of tourists as carriers of a disease. 8. Investigating travel as a fundamental need at the top of Maslow's hierarchy. 9. Examining tourists' perceptions on and management of uncertainty in travel planning. 10. Measuring and tracking changes in destination image (some destinations are riskier than others due to worse hospitals, enforcing hygiene orders etc.). 11. Understanding the role of the pandemic in increasing stereotyping, xenophobia and ethnocentrism. 12. Examining the growing importance of rural tourism and tourists' motivations and travel patterns. 13. Identifying the importance of perceptions of crowding in destinations. 14. Testing the pandemic's effects on overtourism perceptions across countries. 15. Examining resident attitudes to the influx of tourists to less populated rural destinations. 16. Identifying non-travelling or domestic tourism as a conscious choice to reduce the negative impacts of tourism (both environmentally and in the context of a pandemic) or as a consequence of a financial crisis. 17. Examining the emergence of new forms of tourism due to the flexibility of work spaces (e.g. digital nomads).

Demand and Performance Modelling	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Testing the impact of COVID-19 on profitability, employment, demand, transformation of business, career change, employee salaries and benefits. 2. Testing the effect of tourism demand on the socio-economic conditions of a destination due to COVID-19. 3. Testing the regional inequity of destinations in terms of their resilience to COVID-19. 4. Assessing the spatial effects of COVID-19 for various geographic scales, such as country, state/province, city, and sites. 5. Examining the (geo) political influences on tourism policy and destination management. 6. Examining the shift from overtourism as being a problem for big cities to becoming a problem for rural areas.
Forecasting	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Forecasting tourism demand amid major public health crises including COVID-19. 2. Exploring more use of scenario forecasts using judgmental and econometric methods. 3. More focus on forecasting tourist bookings during COVID-19. It is highly important to understand when tourists are planning to come back so hotels and other providers can be more prepared with the correct strategies. 4. Investigating booking trends based on big data from search engines, tourism portals and social media.
Destination and Facility Management	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. A key issue to research is whether tourism facilities such as hotels can be re-designed as multi-purpose facilities that can be transformed into a healthcare facility. For example, studies may conduct key-informant interviews with hotels that exhibited capacity challenges during COVID-19 to design the appropriate strategies for future health crises. 2. Building resilience of tourism stakeholders and destinations. 3. Building stronger links between destinations and their visitors, specifically familiarity, loyalty and trust as means to address increased travel risk perceptions.
Informational Technology	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Testing the impact of technology enhancement on profitability and employment. 2. Testing the impact of technology enhancement on safety and customer satisfaction. 3. Exploring the future role of cryptocurrencies and blockchain in the context of international travel. 4. Assessing how digital media and e-tourism may offer solutions and opportunities in a world affected by a pandemic. 5. Examining the potential of artificial intelligence and machine learning for enriching travel planning and actual holiday experience.

	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 6. Enhancing online experiences, such as augmented reality tours and personal connections through online channels.
<p>Quality of Life and Sustainability</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Examining the shifting focusing on well-being of consumers, residents and employees. 2. Investigating how to create safe and sustainable tourism. 3. Balancing the interests of holidaymakers, tourists and local communities better. 4. Intelligent, not ideological promotion of sustainable and climate-friendly tourism products. 5. Examining the growing importance of health tourism. 6. Deemphasizing tourism research that mainly aims at increasing mass tourism with high environmental impacts.