

COVID MARKETING FOR THE TOURISM INDUSTRY:

A Guidebook on Messaging
for Tour Operators & Travel Agents

VINEYARD

Marketing for inspirational brands

COVID MARKETING

Every tourism company should put out robust and pro-active messaging regarding Covid-19, acknowledging that every effort is being made to keep clients safe, and to indicate that you are open for business. This handbook includes suggested categories and formats for public Covid materials to help jump-start the tourism industry recovery. Please feel free to use this handbook and share widely. If we work together, we can get people traveling again.

Communicate more. Take the time to churn out lots of communications for your trade partners, suppliers and consumers. Keep travel top of mind. Putting out more communications helps reinforce trust.

More is better in this environment. Make communicating a priority.



tone and style

Your materials and messaging should be upbeat, caring, empathetic, and ultimately consumer-friendly. Trust is the most important USP that you can put forward in these times.

Words you should use: *Safe, Healthy, Wellness, Comfort, Dream, Escape, Trust, Welcome, We Care, Open, Enjoy, Happy, Flexible, Accommodating*

Words you should stay away from: *Restrictions, Risk, Liability, Uncertainty, Difficult Times, Lockdown, Closed*

Make sure your Covid policies are translated into the languages of all your key source markets.

visual language

Maintain your visual brand standards when distributing any messaging. Handbooks, Covid documents, guidelines or any materials for public consumption should be designed by a graphic designer, utilizing all internal brand standards — this applies to electronic “hard” copy materials and digital channel information. This is your opportunity to reinforce your brand.

photos & videos

Use professional photos and videos as much as possible. This is a very important strategy to demonstrate your internal new Covid protocols and establish trust among your guests and partners. A picture of a staff member disinfecting a room, or social distancing measures in your reception area will speak volumes above your written copy. Document your efforts visually using professional photography and video trailers.

MANAGING THE DIVERSE SOURCES OF INFORMATION INTERNALLY

Both outbound and inbound tour operators and travel agents have an especially complex messaging challenge given a wide array of suppliers, excursions, destinations and partners. Here are some suggestions to streamline a large volume of information, which is ever-changing, and to make sure your customers and partners are up to date and stay safe while traveling with your company.

- **Streamlining Covid Info and Messaging within your Org Chart** - Designate a particular member of your staff to have ownership/expertise over all the Covid-related policies of your partners. Ideally you would have a Product Manager who is intimately up to date on supplier operations working hand-in-hand with a marketing staff (or consultant) who is developing the Covid marketing materials for your company.
- **Updating your Supplier Info** - Make sure your supplier databases and folders are up to date with all current Covid policies.
- **Pro-Active Information Solicitation** - Set specific consistent timeframes to check back in with all suppliers and providers to see if any news has changed.
- **Keeping Everyone Informed** - Ensure that your entire Reservations/Sales and Product staff are on both the trade and consumer newsletters of your suppliers, so that any partner information lands in everyone's inbox (this is best practice even in non-Covid times).
- **Shifting your Marketing Team** - If your Marketing team is normally externally focused, shift the job description in Covid times, and help them integrate Internal Communications into their portfolio - it's just as important that everyone on the team internally has all the relevant information regarding Covid as your clients and partners.
- **Third Party Information** - Vet external sources of information to make sure that you are getting the most accurate information from third parties such as Tourism Boards, Industry Associations, Governments, and external NGO's or Support Orgs.
- **Media Content** - As a general rule, in this Covid Era, DO NOT use Consumer Media as a resource for destination regulations, guidelines, or travel information. Stay away from sharing Consumer Media content in any external social media channels regarding Covid-related info. This could result in a liability. You do not have the capacity to vet the Consumer Media's information accuracy and could accidentally share misinformation with your guests and partners. DO share Consumer Media for the purpose of promoting a destination, property reviews or features - normal stuff that gives aspirational travel planning information. Stay away from sharing content dealing with Covid, regulations, or destination guidelines. Go directly to governmental sources and tourism destination sources for the most accurate Covid information.
- **Internal Communications** - Set up regular internal newsletters to staff and team members updating everyone on all destination information, supplier information, airline information, etc. Make sure everyone is seeing the same sources
- **Reinforcing SOP's and Messaging** - Set up official training sessions for all staff and team members and make sure to hold weekly (if not daily) staff workshops and meetings to keep reinforcing all Covid policies and company info, and reinforce how you want your staff to "talk about Covid protocols" in front of guests. Be clear what Covid protocols can be shared with guests and ones which are internal only.



HOW TO PRESENT COVID MATERIALS

Mission Statement of Empathy and Gratitude

This is one of the most important pieces of Covid messaging that you need to put out. Guests and partners want to know that you are attending to these issues and that their concerns are your first priority. You also want to convey how happy you are to see them again.

Date of Accepted New Bookings

Even if the borders are closed and the airlines are not flying, you can and should be taking bookings now, even if you are not open yet. Let people know that bookings are available starting on X date.

Guest Arrival Information

- Tour Overview or Itinerary (provide any Covid-specific modifications to a guest itinerary – in terms of change in timing, availability, routes, excursions, modified attractions etc.)

- Airport medical screenings upon arrival (if messaging and language is available – and only directly from airport sources)
- Airport and VISA/Customs Protocol upon arrival at the destination (social distancing, touchless identity mechanisms, etc)
- Welcome Packet with specific Covid language about things to note while traveling
- Arrival Gift Pack/Cleanliness Pack (if you can execute it, tell clients ahead of time that they will be receiving this)

You want to illustrate in your messaging what the arrival will be like and reassure clients that their safety and health will be attended to when they arrive. Map out what the guests will experience in the age of Covid once they step off the plane. They want to know that you will take good care of them. Some of this information is not yet readily available. Don't delay getting out your Covid documents and materials because you are waiting for info from your airport or destination. Update this category of info when you have it.

Covid Terms & Conditions/Booking Procedures

- Pre-Pandemic T&C's = Postponements and Cancellations (set relevant date)
- Post-Pandemic T&C's = New Bookings
- Terms in the event of guest contracting Covid illness while traveling
- Terms in the event of employee/staff contracting Covid while guest is traveling (in event the guest becomes aware)
- Covid Liability Waiver – this should be drafted by an attorney in your source markets
- Company Liability Insurance/Bonded or Licensed

You want to reassure guests that their travel is protected, that you are not going out of business, and that you will be able to refund their purchase in accordance with certain terms and conditions.

Company Employee Policy

(for anyone who interacts with guests in person – including for all excursions/suppliers)

- Employee PPE and Gloves – Guides, Trip Coordinators, Drivers, Local Experts
- Employee Testing & Temperature-taking
- Limiting employees on shift at one time, to minimize density of people on property
- Quarantine mandatory if exposed to Covid

Guests want to know how you are managing your staff. Normally, internal operations are not usually shared with guests. However, in the Covid Era, we have to pull back the curtain as much as possible to gain consumer trust. Transparency is key to market recovery, to reducing liability, and to maintaining guest comfort and satisfaction.



Transportation

- Type of transport your company uses. Private transport available? Larger public vans or buses?
- Size of vehicle, standard carrying capacity for Covid for guests to maintain social distancing
- Sanitizing procedures for transport vehicles
- Driver protocol: masks and gloves
- Plastic barrier dividers when possible between front (driver) and back seat
- Pre-paid or touchless payment including tip (no cash exchanged)

Your Suppliers' Covid SOP's

- Booking Terms & Conditions
- Check-in protocols
- Physical space/social distancing
- Cleanliness and Sanitation
- Food & Beverage
- Amenities Protocols (Pool, spa, gym, etc.)
- Resources for Guests On-Site
- Logistics and layout of excursions and attractions (museums, attractions, outdoor venues, parks, hiking trails, beaches etc.)





Sample Benchmarks & Certifications – Examples

- Safe Travel Program by World Travel and Tourism Council
- Global Biorisk Advisory Council - GBAC Star Facility Accreditation (by ISSA)
- SG Clean Program by Singapore Government
- Stay Safe Guidelines by American Hotel and Lodging Association
- Internally branded cleanliness programs

What You Should Do to Prepare for Travel (Guest) – Examples


- Monitor personal symptoms and stay home if symptomatic
- Bringing a mask and gloves from home
- Social distancing from tour operator staff, property staff and other guests
- Wash hands frequently while traveling and en route
- Have personal medical information and doctors' contacts handy

Help your travelers be good, responsible travelers. This is critical to managing a healthy workforce and maintaining a good brand reputation within the destination. Treat travelers as partners who have responsibility to also keep themselves safe while traveling. Give them every tool to prepare for their trip.

Covid FAQ's - Examples

- When we travel, will we have to submit a health screening before departure?
- What happens if the airport/destination is still closed when our booking comes near?
- Will you be providing hand sanitizer or masks to guests?
- How are we going to get from place to place? Will we have a private vehicle?
- Can my family have a private dining experience, away from crowds?
- What happens if one of us gets Covid while on vacation?
- Is it still safe to sit on the beach and go in the water?

Anticipate what people will ask you or have asked you and put it forward in FAQ's. This is a proactive way to illustrate that you understand guest concerns and may help reduce staff time in having to answer repetitive Covid-related guest questions.



Medical Resources

- Closest emergency room
- Number for emergency medical transportation such as ambulance or private driver/car to call in case guests get sick and need private transport to hospital or medical facilities
- Closest Covid testing site, if needed
- Medical evacuation if necessary, from remote destinations, and/or for repatriation services
- Local physician or primary care practitioner that can be available for check-up, or phone consultation while traveling.
- Telemedicine options available?

*Develop a 1-sheeter on **Medical Resources While Traveling**. Outbound operators and agents should make this piece available only upon request for consumers in the pre-booking stages, or upon arrival in a Welcome Packet. Inbounds or DMCs should develop this sheet and share pro-actively with trade partners to demonstrate that you are well equipped to facilitate medical treatment in the event of an emergency.*

Helpful Links

This should be a series of links to things like Airlines, Destination Tourism Sites, Outbound Embassy Sites to assist travelers in evaluating your destination and receiving updates on transportation and arrival information.

MARKETING CHANNEL CHECKLIST FOR COVID MESSAGING

Covid SOP and T&C
booklet/brochure

Covid Photography and
Videography

Email Newsletters

Blogs

Announcements through Trade
and Industry Associations

Website

- Covid Banner on Homepage
- Covid Section/Page on your website
- Special Promos, Flexible T&C's called out on Home Page

Social Media Content

PR

- Re-Opening Launch Announcement
- Journalist Visits
- Ongoing articles

Special Covid Sales Promos
(PDFs, Page on Website, Social
Media Posts)

Paid Digital – Google/
Facebook Ads for special
Covid Promos

RESOURCES FOR THE HOSPITALITY COMMUNITY (LINKS)

- [World Travel and Tourism Council Safe Travel Program](#)
- [World Travel and Tourism Council Global Protocols](#)
- [ISSA's Global Biorisk Advisory Council \(GBAC\)](#)
- [World Travel Restrictions \(UN\)](#)
- [Observatory on Border Crossings Status due to Covid-19 \(UN Economic Council for Europe\)](#)
- [US Travel Association - the New Normal: Resources for Covid 19](#)
- [IATA Global Restrictions Travel Map](#)
- [National Restaurant Association US - Covid Guidelines](#)
- [Food & Drug Administration US - Best Practices for Restaurants and Food Institutions](#)
- [ServSafe Guidelines](#)





SAMPLE TOURISM COMPANY COVID STATEMENTS/NEW SOP MATERIALS (LINKS)

Hotels:

- [An Update from Our CEO: Marriott's Commitment to Cleanliness](#)
- [Hyatt's Global Cleanliness Commitment](#)
- [Melia's Stay Safe Program](#)
- [Accor's AllSafe Program](#)

Lodges:

- [Mountain Lodges of Peru](#)
- [Grand Canyon National Park Lodges](#)
- [Lemala: Covid-19 Safety Measures](#)
- [The Lodges at Cresthaven](#)
- [Cayuga Collection](#)

Tour Companies:

- [Collette: The Travelling Well Experience](#)
- [Intrepid Travel: A Safe and Responsible Return to Travel](#)
- [A&K Travel and COVID-19](#)
- [Tauk Travel Updates for Covid-19](#)
- [Audley Travel: Travel in Times of Uncertainty – FAQ's](#)
- [GeoEx: Book with Confidence](#)
- [Thomson Family Adventures: Covid, Keeping You Informed](#)



For more information on Covid Marketing or PR Strategies for your organization, or for an invite to our Covid Marketing Resource Dropbox folder, please contact Vineyard Global (headquartered in Boston, USA): info@vineyardglobal.net

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