





**BY NOW**, much of the world has spent close to a full year dealing with the coronavirus pandemic, and one would be hard pressed to argue against the idea that the tourism and travel industries have been impacted the most by the COVID-19 virus.

Whether for people traveling for business, pleasure, or both, these industries have been heavily altered by significant security incidents in the past. Today's business leaders, however, must be flexible enough to deal with a travel environment molded and then re-thrown by

The travel and tourism industries—and those organizations looking to relaunch business travel—must be flexible enough to deal with the uncertainty of the virus, as well as the constantly shifting regulatory landscape of every country.

# REGULATORY Turbulence

an indecisive potter—constantly vacillating and frequently unsettled.

“It is a fact of life,” said Nicole McDargh, CPP, at GSX+ 2020. McDargh is the regional director for physical security, health, safety and building and office services for Richemont Europe, parent organization to luxury goods companies Cartier, Piaget, Chloe, and others.

Rules not only vary from one country to another when analyzing employees' travel plans, but also among each country's regions—and they can change from one day to the next. “It's the rapidly changing and evolving nature of the beast,” she added.

When the COVID-19 pandemic hit Europe, much of Richemont Europe shifted to working virtually. For roughly the first



75 days of Europe’s COVID-19 response, Richemont suspended all travel.

In the same GSX+ session, Security Director for Central and Eastern Europe and Central Asia at PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC) Radek Havlis, CPP, added that at the beginning of the pandemic, PwC outlined the differences between business essential and nonessential travel. PwC then suspended all nonessential business travel until at least the end of 2020.

Richemont and PwC were not the only ones to take these steps. Many companies continue to put business travel on hold. According to a September poll of 1,380 companies conducted by the Global Business Travel Association (GBTA), 92 percent of companies around the world canceled or suspended most (39 percent) or all (53 percent) of their international trips in response to COVID-19. And 70 percent of the companies surveyed canceled or suspended most (46 percent) or all (24 percent) domestic travel within their headquarters country.



### Travel Today

While some aspects of the novel coronavirus remain ambiguous, business leaders understand that they must weigh various considerations when deciding how—and when—to have employees travel.

“Any risk mitigation measure will generate another risk,” Havlis said at GSX+.

For example, if an organization decides to lessen the risk of employee exposure by canceling

## COVID world travel demands flexibility.

all travel, including meeting with existing and potential clients, the organization could avoid potential liability claims. But less exposure could also mean decreased productivity or fewer business opportunities, which in turn could lead to layoffs and other austerity measures. “So, striking the right balance will be the key going forward,” Havlis added.

According to “Resumption of International Business Travel Amid COVID-19 Health Security Concerns: Global Insights from the Private Sector,” a U.S. State Department Overseas Security Advisory Council (OSAC) poll at the end of June, 50 percent of respondents said that their organization expects 50 percent or more of its employees to begin international travel within the next six to 12 months.

For Richemont, some travel—mostly business essential—resumed in September 2020, but McDargh estimated that the business has not yet returned to even 15 percent of travel compared to pre-COVID years.

Part of the difficulty lies in a multi-layered regulatory landscape regarding pandemic protocols. Providing travelers with a list of countries’ rules on dealing with COVID-19 is a daunting challenge—at least some of those rules will change from one day to the next, from one region to the next.

“Now it’s, ‘Okay, you can come from Spain, but not from this part of Spain. Today you can travel from some parts of France, but not other parts of France,’” McDargh explained.

She suggested that employees getting ready for a trip keep an eye on the COVID-19 rules of the destination country, as well as what the home country might demand upon return—up-to-date information and guidance can usually be found on the country, state, or local health department website. Travelers crossing international boundaries should contact the country’s office of foreign affairs or its ministry of health. For employees based in or traveling to the United States, the U.S. Department of State Bureau of Consular Affairs Country Information site has information about entry requirements and limitations. Because these regulations can change during a trip, “COVID world travel demands flexibility,” McDargh said.

The lack of uniform regulations in major regions of the world is a point of frustration among travelers. In fall 2020, the European Tourism Manifesto Alliance sent a letter to the European Commission urging the European Union to develop coordinated travel regulations that apply across member states.

“The need for continued COVID-19 control is foreseeable and...any related border restrictions must be coordinated,” the alliance wrote.

The group of more than 60 European public and private organizations pointed out that current confusion and inconsistency surrounding border restrictions and pandemic protocols



frustrate businesses and travelers. The alliance said that restoring travel with common criteria and measures in dealing with the coronavirus throughout the EU “would provide a vital boost to the travel and tourism sector.”

In September, the European Commission proposed developing a coordinated approach to travel regulations. On 13 October, the council adopted a recommendation to coordinate responses to travel across EU member states, with a scale indicating if an area’s infection rate is trending up or down (i.e., “green” areas mean the 14-day notification rate is lower than 25 cases per 100,000 people and the test positivity rate is less than 4 percent).

“Member states should in principle not refuse entry to persons travelling from other member states,” the commission’s press release said. “Those member states that consider it necessary to introduce restrictions could require

persons travelling from non-green areas to undergo quarantine [or] undergo a test after arrival.”



### Working with Others

“The challenge still is and still will be to strike the right balance between what is possible, what is a must, what are the client requirements, and what is our risk appetite when it comes to delivering our services to our clients,” Havlis said.

He added that businesses should expect increased pressure to conduct regular risk assessments on business travel, even if there is reluctance to reintroduce restrictions. Effective programs will also incorporate greater communication with both employees and clients about protocols meant to protect staff. This often includes one-on-one conversations with clients prior

to a site visit about social distancing and hygiene measures.

PwC is working to maintain good relationships with its clients, who were accustomed to working face-to-face with an employee. Part of that maintenance involves having one-on-one discussions with the client about the measures and rules that need to be in place to protect visiting employees.

If a staff member does not feel comfortable during a client visit, employees have the option of forgoing future trips, and PwC will conduct a follow-up conversation with the client to learn to what extent the rules and regulations are being followed.



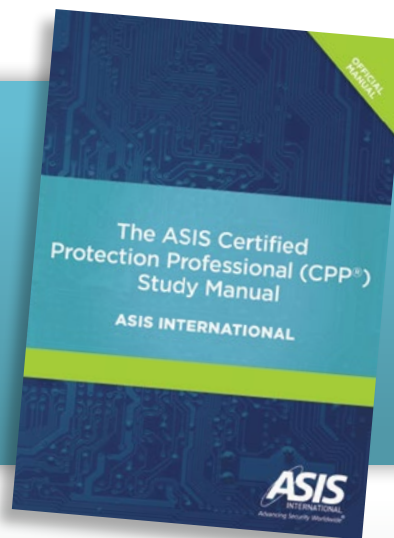
### Beyond the Horizon

In the OSAC poll, 41 percent of respondents said their organizations are ad-

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justing their guidelines from existing international travel policies so that employees can resume international travel.

The GBTA poll reported that as companies consider business travel plans in 2021, the announcement of an effective vaccine for the coronavirus would have the most influence on the planning process.

Vaccine or no vaccine, however, at the end of the day the traveling employees will be making their own personal risk mitigation decisions on the ground. Therefore, preparation and practice before a trip are crucial.

“Emphasis needs to be on helping business travelers prepare by making it easier for them,” advises Meredith Moore, founder and CEO of Greylake Training Solutions.

Risk is an abstract concept for most people, which makes it more difficult for them to be prepared when confronted with danger while traveling, she says. In general, this is because most people do not integrate safety precautions into their daily routines



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while traveling. “It’s very, very hard to get people to change their behaviors,” Moore says.

She suggests travel safety programs introduce employees to systems prior to travel so that they are familiar with services and best practices.

Virtual learning sessions can offer employees the ability to complete pre-travel tasks from home, and a video chat with HR or security managers can help address any lingering questions or concerns.

Whether a program uses immersive learning, virtual reality, or repetitive lessons followed by written tests, tasks that familiarize an employee with the thinking process—rather than focusing solely on the threats themselves—can be helpful in providing someone with a mental script they can rely on if a plan goes sideways.

Moore adds that one of the best formats is for the traveler to have access to an app that would host all needed forms, guidance, and contacts. Having a “one-stop shop” can make a critical difference in hacking travelers’ brains.

Even before the COVID-19 pandemic, Moore says health issues posed by biological threats were the biggest risk employees faced while traveling.

Whether risk presents itself as a virus, a mugger, a bureaucrat with red tape, or a natural disaster, any form of stress can fatigue a traveler, tiring the brain and clouding judgment. Travel programs should therefore also focus on personal resiliency, Moore says.

According to Moore, when cognition is overloaded or stressed, anyone will experience mental fatigue. For employees preparing for a trip, a travel activity program can assist in many ways, including informing someone about the necessary vaccinations or forms required prior to their arrival, sharing who

to contact in an emergency, and raising awareness about how stress can affect safety and security. Such programs can also require employees to develop a personal action plan for a variety of scenarios specific to the destination or the most likely risks he or she could encounter. Such a plan would help develop a problem-solving framework or that mental script to fall back on if security risks do arise.

Several companies acknowledged that protecting their employees’ health remains a serious consideration in determining whether to relaunch travel programs. The GBTA poll found that with an effective vaccine or public health measures, 42 percent of travel managers expect their company’s travel volume will return to pre-pandemic levels within the next three years but is unlikely to exceed it. However, another 36 percent said that business trips will not recover to pre-pandemic levels in that time frame.

Ultimately, the flexibility and resiliency needed today and in the near future for business travel will rely on the traveler and how well the company has prepared him or her.

At the very least, travelers and businesses should anticipate having to deal with the risk of the coronavirus for the foreseeable future.

“Really measure if you need to travel, because it is very likely that you’re going to be subject to quarantine,” McDargh said. “The rules are changing so, so rapidly.” ■

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