

## **Q&A: Ohio Travel Association Webinar with Amir Eylon, April 22, 2020**

Responses below summarize answers provided by  
Amir Eylon and Ohio Travel Association Executive Director Melinda Huntley

### **Tell us a little bit more about your upcoming research questions related to what will make people comfortable to travel again?**

The first report with this question included will be available Tuesday, April 28. Longwoods is asking American travelers to identify the triggers that will make them feel comfortable to travel again. Fear is something all of us are going to have to cope with right now. Will travelers feel comfortable to travel again for non-essential travel when the health department says so? If not, what will make them feel comfortable? There will be a new normal for travel until a vaccine is developed. How quickly travel resumes will not be determined by travel marketing and the tourism industry; it will be determined by the public health authorities and governments. We are going to have to communicate in all of our marketing efforts that we are clean and safe.

### **Thanks for the research information, Amir. Regarding the people you survey, are they the same 1,000 people every week and are they from Ohio only?**

American travelers 18 years older and older who travel from throughout the United States are chosen randomly each week. It is a way to create a snapshot of American travelers as a whole.

### **Based on your survey, do you see a difference between intent to travel among demographic groups?**

The sample size used can't be broken down with confidence, as this is a quick poll to get information out to the industry with speed. However, other research is beginning to paint a picture where older Americans will be more reluctant to travel compared to younger Americans.

Think about life phases and not generations as you think about who might be traveling. Those who have young children, are primary bread-winners, who have health issues regardless of age, and who have frequent contact with higher-risk individuals may not put themselves at risk by traveling until they feel safe. These types of life phases and responsibilities are likely to impact travel decisions in the future far more than generational influences.

### **What types of experiences do you feel will rebound first?**

The experiences that will likely span all ages will be those that are outdoors. Driving before flying, because I can control how clean my car is. Mass gatherings such as stadium events are likely to rebound slower and will likely be among the last to open fully.

Your choice of images on social media and advertising is also going to be important. Be more aware of how closely people are spaced in the images you choose. Using images of a jam-packed street festival is likely not going to be a good choice for some time.

May 1 is not going to be a green light to resume business as usual. Not every business will likely be open. Nonessential travel doesn't appear in the national guidelines until Phase Two, as an example. If you are a DMO, you need to understand that what you can promote will be dictated by someone other than yourself. It will be influenced by what is permitted to be open, what is ready to open because safety protocols are in place, and how ready your community is to welcome guests.

### **How does the intent to travel in the next six months compare to what you saw in 2019?**

Longwoods wasn't tracking this in 2019, as this survey was initiated to respond to COVID-19.

## **What are your thoughts on attractions and destinations taking an approach to promote planning now?**

You have to be careful about not being tone-deaf. This was particularly important early in this crisis, but now, people are starting to think about bucket lists. You still have to do this very tastefully. People will travel when they feel better about traveling again.

## **When do you switch from messages that promote local versus planning a trip?**

When public health officials say it's okay to resume non-essential travel. You also need to make sure you have your safety protocols in place according to whatever that may be when released. For attractions, hotels, restaurants, etc., don't market until you have your safety protocols in place and activated. You can't put the welcome mat out until you are ready for guests. For DMOs, are your attractions and local businesses prepared to keep guests and workers safe? You should not rush to promote before your local partners are ready.

## **How can resorts and waterparks open if it's harder to physical distance?**

There is an Ohio governor's task force formed to look at recommendations for mass gatherings. Hopefully, there will be guidelines coming out of that group. OTA is also working to build best practices.

Recognize, however, that what you need to do is going to be unique to your business and what is needed to keep your employees, guests and delivery folks safe. Role play and look at every interaction every guest, worker or delivery person has with 1. a surface and 2. another person. Then brainstorm ways to eliminate that interaction or figure out a way to sanitize.

We already know that re-opening will come in phases, with restrictions at each phase. The initial phases will be far more restrictive than the latter, but there will still be restrictions in place as long as there isn't a vaccine.

Also, be very careful about making sure your local community is on-board before you start marketing to bring guests back to your community or business. There are examples elsewhere where community residents have not felt comfortable due to lack of health care facilities or fear and have pushed back on marketing and re-openings.

## **Is it okay to highlight parks when much of the state is shut down?**

Although there is nothing wrong with encouraging people to go outdoors, it's a balance to encourage people to do this safely. We do not want to go through start-and-stops based on resurgences, so we need to encourage responsible travel.

## **Local media keeps asking about the economic impact of COVID-19. We have all been conditioned to be positive. What are your thoughts on how we should respond?**

We need to be 100% honest and transparent. Tell it like it is, or how will others know of our economic crisis?

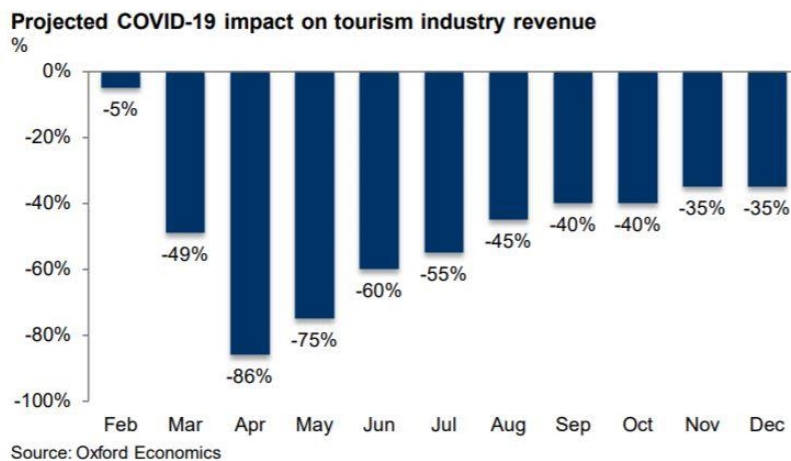
It's also an opportunity to show how important travel is in the economy. It's not just about hotel layoffs; it's about layoffs at the businesses who sell goods and services to these hotels. It's also about the lack of spending that is occurring because so many people are laid off based on this reduced travel. One-third of the national layoffs are in the travel industry. We need to tell this story.

When our help is needed to breathe life back into economies later, then local media and decision makers need to understand why resources are needed to promote travel.

## What is the percentage decrease of attendance you estimate attractions will have compared to their usual annual attendance?

This is very hard to predict and will largely be dictated by health officials and what capacity is permissible. Make sure your business is connected to your local health department, and make sure you are communicating any challenges with compliance with the Ohio Travel Association, Ohio Hotel and Lodging Association, etc. They have relationships with state officials who will be eager to understand how the guidelines are working.

Consumer demand and willingness to travel will also be dictated by the type of experience you offer, and that will impact attendance. The following is a chart provided by Oxford Economics that shows impact will occur through 2020. Recognize this is based on a study released several weeks ago – further delay in openings will change these assumptions.



## What do you think travel will look like in the near future?

Travelers will likely travel in progression. It may look something like this for the leisure market:

- Go outside their homes
- Go to a local park
- Go out to dinner at a local business
- Visit a nearby outdoor recreation destination that is close by
- Take an afternoon and go somewhere close
- Take a long weekend
- Take a vacation

Other key travel intentions may be visiting friends and relatives. Speaking to locals will be really important at first.

## Are there specific insights into hotel/lodging- shared lodging vs hotels?

Some advanced booking data is showing a slight rise in 90-day bookings. There is some thought that larger brands that are aggressively developing safety standards may have an advantage. Smaller and shared properties are all going to have to demonstrate that protocols are in place.