



PREPARING FOR TAKE-OFF

How the travel industry is embracing change,
getting back on their feet and back in the air.

M&CSAATCHI

Initially, like the thousands of empty suitcases gathering dust around the country, the travel industry had been truly grounded by Covid-19. Over half of UK consumers had either cancelled or decided against going on a holiday they'd already booked (Mintel). And who can blame them? When it comes to safety, uncertainty is a deal breaker.

Now many people are deciding to take the plunge and travel abroad. But the population is split between those scared to travel and those desperate for an escape and willing to take the risk. Currently, the confusion lies in everchanging travel restrictions and constant fear of a race to the border following a sudden update of quarantine measures.

But the headlines of horror don't tell the full story

Nor do they do justice to the resilience of the nation and the travel industry as a united force going forward (and upward).

The industry's good humour and creativity is beginning to shine through again, with our recent work for Promote Iceland being one example. We've created a website that allows you to scream into the Icelandic abyss, getting all of your frustrations out. Quite therapeutic, [you can try it here.](#)

It is still unknown if the travel industry has seen the worst impact of COVID-19, but we've been fortunate enough to speak to expert marketers from brands including Virgin Atlantic, National Express, Eurotunnel, Small Luxury Hotels of the World and Dorchester Collection about how they've harnessed change in the face of adversity – sensitively and creatively.

And we're starting to see little pockets of optimism and opportunity

The current challenges and the recession have created a wealth divide that directly impacts the travel industry and the services it offers, and they've responded with aplomb.

Whether revisiting camping holidays for the first time in years, at an eco-friendly quiet site, or upgrading to premium options, the spectrum of trips holidaymakers are considering has significantly increased. Over the coming year, we'd expect that travel brands will continue to find new and perhaps unusual ways to meet changing consumer demand.



**ARE WE
THERE YET?**

The Change: From grounded to on our way.

It's ok to talk about booking now for travel this summer.

We're all feeling it; Pent up, frustrated, cash strapped and in desperate need of something to look forward to – with many of us quite literally counting down the days until we can switch our lockdown gear for beach wear, slippers for sandals, tea for Tequila sunrise (pause for daydream)..... Ok, back to reality.

When asked 'What are you most looking forward to doing once the current social distancing measures are relaxed?', consumers answered 'spending time in person with friends and family' (56%) followed closely by 'getting away on holiday' (30%) (Mintel).

And it's clear to see that confidence is returning. Slowly but surely, consumers are taking a leap of faith in booking a holiday. According to Travel Weekly, upon the announcement that travel restrictions in Europe will start to lift from the 6th of July, TUI reported a 50% week-on-week increase in bookings and 80% by lastminute.com. Things are looking up.



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People are getting a bit restless. There's a real desire, of course with caution and concern, to get to back some version of normality.

–Annabelle Cordelli,
Virgin Atlantic

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2 RISE OF FLEXIBLE TRAVEL

The Change: From peak holiday seasons to ‘get there while you can’.

Watch how travel changes in line with remote working and more transient lifestyles.

As our daily routine and work/life balance has been turned on its head, so too has ‘peak’ and ‘off peak’ travel. For families with children home from school, the lure of a summer holiday at a lower price is one that can’t be resisted. For some, grabbing the chance to escape before the dreaded ‘second wave’ has to be done. Perhaps a longer ‘home away from home’ trip is the perfect bridge between working remotely and taking a break. Or maybe, after being cooped up in lockdown, a change of scenery has never looked so good.

In speaking with VistaJet, it’s this new kind of flexibility in the way we live our lives which is likely to shake up the traditional peak and off peak times of travel, shifting from Summer to all-season and weekend to mid-week.



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We're seeing a lot of one-way travel. The industry thrived in summer traditionally getting people on a Friday afternoon down to France and coming back on a Monday morning. With people working from home now, there's no rush to get back.

-Ian Moore,
VistaJet

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**CUT THE BULL@£\$%,
TELL ME I'LL BE SAFE**

The Change: From warm waffle to the pragmatic and helpful.

Be explicit on how the new rules impact anyone who chooses to travel.

When it comes to health and safety, all eyes are on the travel industry to lead the way through action, rather than words. People are bored of hearing the same regurgitated reassurances, time and time again ('we're all in this together', 'in these unprecedented times', 'we're here to help you'... *YAWN*). Many of the brands we've spoken to have had to change everything, overnight and continue to do so, to keep up with the ever-evolving government guidance.

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Communications have been very samey, everyone is talking about ‘togetherness’. It’s just noise and we were very cautious about adding to that noise.”

–Chris Ford, Greater Anglia

“We’re giving our customers the facts, explaining what’s happening really clearly and simply so we can help them navigate. All of our effort has been spent on this and making sure, as much as possible, that we respond to questions, proactively providing the right information.

–Annabelle Cordelli,
Virgin Atlantic

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THE DREADED C-WORD

The Change: From generic sterility to the safe and welcoming.

We're still dealing with humans. Be gentle and respectful.

If ever there was a need to escape reality, it's during Coronavirus. Allowing ourselves to relax (but not too much) will be key. One example of a brand that's found a simple solution to help with this is Etihad Airways. By opting for a less surgical design for their PPE, whilst still prioritising optimum safety, they're finding the balance between being Covid-secure and avoiding the fear factor that too often comes as part of that.



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There has been so much change to operations and procedure, it's important to remember we're dealing with people, so keeping the human aspect is key.”

–Terry Daly, Etihad

“We don't want PPE to become a barrier, so our specially trained ‘Wellness Ambassadors’ choose to see their gowns as enablers of better customer experience. They provide essential travel health information and care so guests can fly with greater peace of mind.

–Linda–Patrice Celestino, Etihad

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What I do think is that travellers will be split into two more distinct camps moving forward – people who return to normal as soon as they are able to and move on, and those who take a more considered approach to how they live their lives in general, including how they travel and the environments they are putting themselves in.

**–Richard Hyde, Small
Luxury Hotels of the World**

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LISTEN TO YOUR CORE AUDIENCE

The Change: From pleasing everyone to focusing on your core.
Find the insights in your customer data and if you need to know more, just ask.

Whilst many brands will be transforming their entire business model to keep up with the ever-changing state of affairs, they could run the risk of changing their identity past the point of all recognition to their loyal customers. Things like running promotions and slashing costs may well attract a short-term following but when things return to normal (and they will someday) they could find that both audiences are disengaged.

Dorchester Collection operate some of the most prestigious hotels in the world. Aside from implementing the necessary safety measures, at the request of their most loyal guests, their response to the pandemic was to keep as close to business as usual. In a world where almost everything had suddenly changed, Dorchester customers were seeking consistency and familiarity.

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We don't want to play a rate war, we want to get as close to service as normal. We didn't want to change what makes our hotel special. Our guests feel very free to tell us what's not right and what they don't like.

–Helen Smith,
Dorchester Collection

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The Change: From the thrill of the unknown to a need for the familiar.

Consider opportunities to rekindle nostalgia, offering past destinations, with a fresh twist.

With such uncertainty and the nagging fear of a 'second wave', it's hardly surprising that many brands are experiencing a shift from international to domestic travellers. Whether it's revisiting old childhood memories or discovering brand new destinations on the doorstep – there's clearly a lot to be said for Staycations and the sense of nostalgia they bring.

Likewise, people are trading in adventure packed holidays and the thrill of the unknown for destinations that are familiar and 'safe', the places they've visited before. They're visiting locations they can easily fly or drive out of if 'shit were to hit the fan', allowing for some feelings of control.



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I have 800 years of history, 800 metres around me. There's so much that we take for granted. We've shifted our marketing plan to focus on domestic travel and to encourage Limerick residents to explore their own city.”

–Laura Ryan,
Limerick City
and County Council

“Lots of Brits as kids went to France with their parents. There is something that doesn't feel too terrifying about France. It's partly to do with the fact that if something were to go wrong, you can just jump in your car and drive back. It gives people more control.

–Jae Hopkins, Eurotunnel

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A PREMIUM FOR PRIVACY

The Change: From moving with the herd to lone wolf.
Fewer holidays with isolation and remote locations at a premium.

It's fair to say that caution will outlive the virus itself, by months, if not years to come. Consumers will opt for a 'quality over quantity' approach, swapping more frequent travel, for fewer, better quality experiences – perhaps paying a premium for more isolated and controlled environments. With this in mind, as well as the usual 'sea views' and 'mini bar', the opportunity to isolate as much as possible will become an amenity at the top of everyone's wish lists.

And our approach to spending will vary greatly too, impacting not only the travel industry, but every sector globally. During this global hibernation period, some may have had an opportunity to save money and are now ready to spend whilst others have been hit hard and are still on a long path to economic recovery.

Personal villas, private flights and remote locations will provide the peace of mind that holiday-goers are looking for, with the more fortunate among us, willing (and able) to pay more for the luxury of this greater level of safety.

The new luxury consumer will expect more than even before from a luxury online experience. They will want even more of a highly personalised, private in store experience, and will no doubt influence the return of timelessness heritage and craftsmanship to the luxury sector.

**–Jenni Benzaquen,
Marriott International**





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We've seen a big increase in incoming interest from people who have never flown privately before. They've always had the wealth to fly privately but have chosen not to until now.

-Ian Moore, VistaJet

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DIVERSIFYING THE APPROACH GLOBALLY

The Change: From Global to localised approach

Tracking shifts in demand for each market helps focus marketing efforts.

The approach to tackling COVID19 has varied across borders, with countries such as New Zealand calling a halt to the pandemic faster than others, such as the United States (who are still seeing an increase in cases and deaths). No longer will the likes of Disney World cut it when it comes to enticing travellers from around the world. Now, the lowest risk is the greatest attraction. As such, brands are working to meet the increased demand to these safe zones and equally shift attention away from those lagging behind.



Germany is one of our best markets now, at least domestically, given their ability to better control the virus. We are taking a very localised view and can see the increase or decrease of demand in each market based on their response.

-Alun Williams, [hotelbeds.com](https://www.hotelbeds.com)

0 TAKING USP FURTHER

The Change: From inventing differentiation to playing to brand strengths.

If your brand or product has a relevant and genuine point of difference, make sure you let people know.

When it comes to the travel industry, defining a clear USP can be a tricky business. But recently, brands have been finding smart ways to play to their strengths and some have even seized the opportunity to remind customers why they exist in the first place.

Take Eurotunnel for example. Travellers can drive onto their shuttle and arrive in France without having to be in close contact with anyone outside of their vehicle. Their USP has never been more appealing or relevant.

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We have such an advantage as the only method of transport where you are socially distanced all the way through, it'd be careless not to use it.

–Jae Hopkins, Eurotunnel

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10 **POWER OF PERSONAL**

The Change: From tightly controlling the process, to giving staff a voice.

Lean on the people that will best represent your brand and voice.

Never before has the relationship between employee and employer been tested so much. Some brands have passed with flying colours, protecting jobs and prioritising staff health and safety, whilst others have failed miserably. With the big bosses under the spotlight of the media and brand following alike – poor treatment of staff has quickly, and quite rightly, been condemned.

For many people, Dorchester Collection is a home away from home and the staff become friends, even family. From bartenders to managers to the housekeeping, the brand identified the staff members with the closest relationship to their most important guests. They urged them to reach out on a personal level, easing anxiety and uncertainty and reassuring them that everything will be as they left it when (not if) they return in the future.

We let our guests know we were hanging on to all of our staff. The personal relationship is the thing people are clinging onto. Hotel guests have been hearing from whoever knows the guest best, they've created hand-written notes and postcards. It's been very personal and human versus a generic message.

**–Helen Smith,
Dorchester Collection**






LEMONS TO LEMONADE

The Change: From standstill to resourceful adaptation.
Explore short-term alterations to your sources of revenue; could you make money in other ways?

As commercial flights have experienced an overwhelming drop in passengers, airlines have repurposed their routes to deliver much needed supplies and packages around the world, keeping pilots in the job and providing essential distribution.



Commercially, passenger flight is down, but we haven't stopped flying. We adapted planes to carry more cargo, as they would do anyway, then those routes that are profitable, are the ones we're offering passenger space on now and next, at the lowest cost we can. The cargo supplements the flight and makes it viable for us to start our ascent out.

-Terence Daly, Etihad

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TRAVEL IS WHERE THE HEART IS

The Change: From the need for functional to the promise of human connection.

Don't forget the important role you play in people's lives.

Holidays play an important role in reconnecting people. And right now, it's that human connection that we're missing more than ever before. A hug, a chat, a hand-in-hand dive bomb into the pool. Making memories and making friends for life. Longer term, travel brands will do well to focus their marketing on reminding people what they have been missing.



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People are sick of staring at the same four walls. Eventually, in our marketing we'll move to a more emotional space around reconnection. Bringing together loved ones and taking people to the places they've missed.”

–Philip Collins, National Express

“We can't lose sight of the enjoyment and what travel brings to people's lives. It is a part of life that is extremely fulfilling. Yes, we'll have to take steps to make sure we travel in a different way but the underlying role of travel in people's lives won't go away.

–Annabelle Cordelli, Virgin Atlantic

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10 IN IT FOR THE LONG HAUL

The Change: From short-term despair to a triumphant return.

Remember, time is the greatest healer. What do you need to be doing now for your customers to do better in 2021, 2022 and beyond?

This isn't the first time the travel industry has been majorly affected and likely won't be the last. After the horrific events of 9/11, naturally, consumer confidence was at an all-time low and a steep drop in bookings followed. Likewise, after the financial crash in 2008, the natural reaction for consumers was to hold onto their money. A holiday became a luxury that many couldn't afford.

In the case of Covid-19, it's both the safety and economic barriers that come into play. For brands to turn it around, they will have to find new and creative ways to provide a solution to both of these hurdles. Only then will we see sunnier climates for the travel industry, once again.



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I think the travel industry is pretty resilient. We will bounce back. Consumers will be looking for value for money, they are savvier, and as a brand we're really well placed for that.”

–Philip Collins, National Express

“70% of the 20–35 age group would select their next trip according to sustainability standards and it's up to us to make this something that all generations consider. I think the key thing right now is to find the right balance between encouraging change and helping our hotels get back on their feet.

–Richard Hyde, Small Luxury Hotels of the World

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BIG THANKS



Linda-Patrice Celestino,
VP of Guest and
Customer Experience

Terry Daly,
Exec Director of
Guest Experience



Jae Hopkins,
Director Sales & Marketing



Chris Ford,
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VP of Marketing



Alun Williams,
Director Hotelbeds Group



Helen Smith,
Chief Customer
Experience Officer

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