

Communicating and Responding to Customers

Covid-19 Global Pandemic



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TABLE OF CONTENTS

PAGE

1.	INTRODUCTION	3
2.	SHOW YOU UNDERSTAND THE IMPORTANCE OF THE SITUATION	4
	2.1 Get Your Message Out	4
	2.2 Coronavirus Information Page	5
	2.3 Inform your Clients through Email	6
3.	SUSPENDED AND CANCELED TRIPS	7
4.	GETTING NEW BOOKINGS	8
5.	GOVERNMENT TRAVEL ADVICE FOR COVID-19	9

1. INTRODUCTION

This document has been put together by the Falkland Islands Tourist Board to provide assistance to businesses that have business to consumer (B2C) relationships which they need to manage in this difficult and uncertain time for tourism.

If you interact directly with customers overseas (or even in the Falklands) we hope the advice in this guide will be of help.

There are many links to websites in the guide, and therefore it is intended to be read online, so that you can view the various pages that provide more information, useful articles, and examples.

Tourism is a big industry, and Covid-19 is affecting virtually everyone. Therefore, we have not tried to reinvent the wheel, but sought out examples of best practice around the world that are useful and can be used or adapted.

2. SHOW YOU UNDERSTAND THE IMPORTANCE OF THE SITUATION

2.1 Get Your Message Out

It is important that your customers know that you understand the importance of the current situation, and you are taking it seriously. This will give them additional confidence dealing with you.

The first step is to create a coronavirus information page (see Section 2.2) on your website, or on your Facebook page if you use this for bookings.

If you keep a database of clients, you should also to contact them all by email (see Section 2.3). Remember to put clients first (they are suffering just like you) - show empathy and show you care about their health.

Below are some good examples of getting the right messages out:

Example 1: Kuodatravel.com

<https://www.kuodatravel.com/coronavirus-travel-faqs/>

"If you're planning to travel, read on to learn more about the coronavirus and tips for staying safe on the road"

Example 2: RowAdventures.com

<https://www.rowadventures.com/blog/coronavirus-update>

"We extend our heartfelt sympathy to anyone who has been impacted"

Example 3: Eftours.com

<https://www.eftours.com/help-center/safety/coronavirus-faq>

"This is a difficult situation for everyone, but the health and safety of our travellers and staff is our top priority"

2.2 Coronavirus Information Page

Have a link on your website home page (directly visible) to a page that informs about the coronavirus situation in the Falklands. If you only use Facebook, then it should be a prominently placed message at the top of the page.

Update your information on a daily basis - things move extremely fast, and you don't want to communicate outdated data. Also, up-to-date postings show you are monitoring the situation which instils further confidence.

Make sure you get your information only from trusted government sources - even big press agencies such as Reuters are spreading information that might not be true.

Below are some ideas of what you should add on your coronavirus information page; you can choose to make a blog, or a FAQ, or both:

- Wish your clients to be safe
- Put clients first (they are suffering just like you) - show empathy and show you care about their health.
- Try to bond - we are in this together
- Short summary about what will be on the page
- Add how your company is coping
- Information of suspended operations
- Information of new terms and conditions
- Summary of the current situation in the Falklands
- Links to travel advisories in key markets
- Links to relevant FIG website pages

Below are some examples of what we think are good practice and provide some good suggestions. Pick parts that you find fit your company and use that in your own statement.

<https://www.tucantravel.com/about-us/before-you-go/safety-updates>

<https://www.martinrandall.com/coronavirus>

<https://www.explore.co.uk/travel-updates>

<https://www.gadventures.com/coronavirus-travel-faq/>

<https://www.andbeyond.com/notices/travel-in-times-of-uncertainty/>

<https://www.trafalgar.com/en-us/resources/coronavirus-travel-update>

<https://www.intrepidtravel.com/en/covid19>

<https://www.trekamerica.com/covid-19-travel-suspension>

<https://www.insightvacations.com/asia/information/travel-update>

<https://worldexpeditions.com/travel-advisory>

<https://www.kuodatravel.com/coronavirus-travel-faqs/>

2.3 Inform your Clients through Email

Be proactive and keep your clients up-to-date through email. It's a good opportunity to contact them anyway – think of it as a good excuse to do some marketing, even though the news isn't good right now, it will get better, and you want them to come back to you.

Advice Setting Up Email:

- Be personal
- Wish your clients are safe
- What will happen with upcoming tours?
- Cancellation terms, free date change, etc
- Link to your page for in depth information
- Brief summary of current situation in the Falklands
- State how important tourism is for the Falklands and the community
- Include a beautiful picture of people or wildlife in the Falklands
- Be positive with something about the situation ending in the coming weeks
- Wish your client and family to stay healthy and see each other in good health in the Falklands soon

Below are some example emails for you to draw ideas from:

Wilderness Travel

This starts off by referencing the health and well-being of the traveller. It is also of a good length.

<https://mailchi.mp/wildernesstravel/coronavirus-2020-newsletter?e=93d0c53f54>

Austin Adventures

This one is nice and personal, although it is perhaps a little too long.

<https://www.austinadventures.com/travel-resources/dan-austin-address-coronavirus-concerns/>

This is probably a good place to think forward a little. When the restrictions on travel are lifted, in the Falklands we have a distinct unique selling point (USP) – we are well away from the crowds. We have strong reason to believe that wilderness and off-the-beaten-track destinations will be sought after. Whilst this link is for a destination that isn't remotely like the Falklands, they are picking up on the "escape the crowds" message. Consider using something similar when the time comes.

Journey Mexico

<https://mailchi.mp/journeymexico/time-to-escape-the-crowds-mexicos-the-answer?e=f0de0a1031>

3. SUSPENDED AND CANCELED TRIPS

Arguably, the most important aspect of the coronavirus situation for travellers is knowing what will happen to existing bookings. Can they cancel? Can they defer?

You must communicate clearly on your home page or Facebook clearly:

- Until when tours will be suspended
- Until when accommodation is closed
- Information on the suspension of any other services

But also, be clear about new bookings. You don't want to discourage new bookings, but you do want customers to feel confident in making them (in fact at the current time they are unlikely to book unless they receive reasonable assurances).

TucanTravels.com: "Tucan Travel has suspended group tours until 01 July 2020 at the earliest. Please see our safety update page here. New Bookings are Welcome!"

For Suspended Travel/Bookings

Offer free rebooking, or better still, offer rebooking plus a bonus. G-Adventures is currently offering a 110% travel credit (see below) for all tours that have been suspended. Not only will this provide the consumer with the flexibility to re-book, but will also make them feel as though they are at least getting something positive out of the disruption.

"If you have paid final payment: If they have booked a tour scheduled to depart between March 16, 2020 and May 31, 2020, you will be provided with a future travel credit valued at 110% of the price paid for their tour and any ancillary services including hotels, pre-paid optional activities, and transfers; but excluding airfare and insurance"

<https://www.gadventures.com/coronavirus-travel-faq/>

For Cancelled Bookings

Think about your cancellation policy. Make it clear and fair. Most operators and accommodation establishments have fallen into a similar pattern. The key thing is the dates for which the policy applies. Don't make your policy and forget about it, as you may need to extend it. If you keep an eye on what the rest of the industry is doing it should help. Some good examples are below:

Policy Intrepid

<https://www.intrepidtravel.com/uk/covid19>

Policy Insight Vacations

<https://www.insightvacations.com/asia/information/travel-update>

Social Tours

<http://socialtours.com/be-inspired/booking/payments-and-cancellations>

4. GETTING NEW BOOKINGS

How do you encourage travellers to book a trip to a destination during a pandemic? First of all, you don't!

<https://skift.com/2020/03/19/tourism-marketers-enter-wait-and-see-mode-to-avoid-tone-deaf-campaigns/>

In line with tourist boards around the world (Visit Brighton has changed its Twitter feed to #Do Not Visit Brighton) the FITB is marketing with a "Dream Now Travel Later" theme. It is irresponsible to encourage travel at this time, but this will change, and being ready for each of our key markets when we emerge from the global pandemic is critical.

Overall, your philosophy should be: Don't push too hard, but do emphasize that you take new bookings.

Use tag lines such as:

- Book now with confidence
- Flexibility when you come
- Extra discount if you book now

A good example is *Camino Ways*: "All new bookings from 9th March can enjoy 1 free date change, up to 30 days before your trip is due to start"

<https://caminoways.com/travel-plans-can-change-enjoy-more-flexibility>

Make sure all new bookings are made with very clear booking conditions. These should include:

- What do you do in case of a lock down?
- A very honest assessment of the situation – there are so many unknowns

These two pages are good examples (you may have looked at these already):

<http://socialtours.com/be-inspired/booking/payments-and-cancellations>

<https://www.tucantravel.com/booking-conditions>

Adventure Travel News has an excellent page of advice:

<https://www.adventuretravelnews.com/covid-19-guide-for-the-adventure-travel-industry>

5. GOVERNMENT TRAVEL ADVICE FOR COVID-19

Keep informed about the travel advice in our key markets, as ultimately these will have a significant impact on when demand returns. Most countries are influenced by the advice given by these countries.

United Kingdom

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/travel-advice-novel-coronavirus>

United States of America

<https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/traveladvisories/traveladvisories.html/>

Australia

<https://www.smartraveller.gov.au/news-and-updates/coronavirus-covid-19>

New Zealand

<https://www.safetravel.govt.nz/>

Canada

<https://travel.gc.ca/travelling/advisories>

France

<https://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/en/country-files/>