



RESPONSE TO CORONONA VIRUS – COVID-19  
HCI BANKER RALLY CALLS  
877-256-0794  
May 8, 2020 – 10am CT

**Purpose of the call:**

What will Group Travel look like in a Post-Covid-19 world?

**Representation:**

20 bankers, 10 Partners, 7 (8) PTOs, 2 staff – 10 states/provinces  
GA, ID, IL, IA, MA, MN, MO, NE, NH, WI

Ted introduced ITMI and that these questions are similar to a call they did recently.

**AGENDA**

**I What are your top 3 or 4 concerns regarding travel safety?**

With so many members from all categories on the call, we got a very good sampling of how this question is looked at from various perspectives. Loads of concerns and worry about an uncertain future were discussed. All members recognized that first local, state and federal government needs to give them direction on what is permitted. Then they must take those advisories and see if the traveler is looking for even more in order to feel safe traveling. Once we know what the limitations are for the traveler, then we can provide the trip they need.

Right now, we are continuing to speculate as we do not have a well-coordinated or well-articulated plan from those officials for when to begin traveling and what safety measures will be needed.

***Social Distancing:***

This question will have a huge impact on many parts of travel. Beginning with transportation, it is easy to imagine that airplane and motorcoach capacity and configuration will be much different. While an airplane has an overall large enough capacity to take a full group spread out throughout the aircraft, a motorcoach does not have that luxury and that will likely require sending groups of only 15-20 guests or using multiple coaches for larger groups. By extension, transportation challenges would also include cruise ships, train travel and so on.

Then the impact on restaurants, theaters, attractions would also be felt as the groups may need to be divided into smaller subsets depending on the capacity of the facilities. It even impacts city walking tours. If the guests need to spread out, then the voice of the tour guide might not be heard by all, which will likely drive companies to technology solutions for listening devices that already exist today. Some partners are already planning to eliminate the welcome when they would board the coach to greet everyone. A nice, but now unnecessary point of contact.

### ***Group Gatherings:***

Government decision on this question could impact gatherings even as small as 10. However, the larger concern is event venues that might not be allowed to open, such as professional sports and major festivals. Will they be allowed to open with limited capacity and rules for social distancing?

### ***Masks:***

The general consensus was that even if government does not require masks to be worn, that most banks, tour operators, attractions might require it, so that there is a greater sense of safety and comfort to those travelers who might otherwise choose not to travel. The question was also about who would provide the masks and how many? Should the guests be required to bring their own? Should the bank provide them? Should the tour operator or bus company provide them? Should the attraction or venue provide them?

The question extended to who should be wearing the masks besides the guests – club director, coach driver, tour guide, everyone serving the guests – restaurants, gift shops, and so on. Generally speaking, we anticipate that most of these will be in masks for a while at least and especially those that will be within 6-10' of the guests.

### ***Temperatures:***

Some places have already instituted this practice, where each guest wanting entrance would be required to have a normal temperature. Others thought this might start to take on greater importance once travel begins and we should be prepared for the extra time it will take to have temperatures taken at various points of a journey. It was reported that for some of the larger conferences being held in communities, that the delegates would need to have their temps taken to be able to come to the conference each day.

A big question was what do our bank club directors do with the guests whose temperatures exceed the limit? Send them home? Does insurance cover this?

***Sanitizing:***

Everyone agreed that this was a new, higher level of standard expected everywhere. Much more available hand sanitizer to be used by the guests themselves including boarding a plane or coach, walking into a hotel lobby, at every restaurant, and so on. On top of this, of course, is the full expectation that the venues themselves would undertake new protocols for cleaning all surfaces. Hotels and attractions mentioned removing unnecessary things to lower risk of contamination and the need to clean many more things. Airplanes are likely to eliminate all dining, magazines, perhaps even aisle service of snacks and drinks. Some hotels are planning to wait 48 hours before re-renting a room. This is likely a transition plan; as business increases this will be difficult to maintain. Restaurants that served buffets historically are likely to change to plated meals. Everywhere - including airlines and motorcoaches - will need to constantly wipe down surfaces.

***Customer Fear:***

This, of course, will likely direct when travel will resume. If the customer remains fearful, they will likely cancel, not book or just postpone to later dates. It is incumbent upon all partners, tour operators and the banks to have anticipated all the concerns and address them in the literature they use to promote the tours. Honesty and clarity will be very important to build traveler-confidence.

***Bank Liability:***

The question arose about whether the bank has any new liability to be certain these safety measures are in place or to provide some themselves. It was understood that each individual bank should seek the advice of their own attorneys on this question. Most banks reported that their customers are expecting the bank to make good decisions and will know when it is safe to travel. This is a strong testament to our bank club directors' history of care and customer relationships.

***Increased Costs with smaller groups:***

Bankers were concerned that the cost of trips will increase as the fixed costs of motorcoaches, tour guides and so on, will now be divided by far fewer people than in the past. As fixed costs are only a part (though important part) of the final costs, their increased costs will affect part of the cost of the trip. It will be difficult for everyone to meet these new demands and expect prices to stay the same. The challenge will be to find an acceptable level of increase that the guest understands is for their own protection.

## **II How far out are banks cancelling their trips?**

Several of the banks said everything through August has cancelled at this point.

Several still had smaller trips on the books for June and a few had longer trips they are still hoping to take in July and August.

One or two have been told by management not to travel in 2020 and begin a fresh start in 2021, with one bank saying that they won't travel until the vaccine has been developed and available.

Most are still hopeful for travel in the Fall.

Most report that customers are eager to travel and tired of being cooped up.

## **III What are the PTOs and partners doing today to help with this question?**

The PTOs reported staying in touch with the question of when borders will be opening to allow travel to take place in certain countries or even within certain countries. When they have news on this they share with the banks. Most European countries are expected to open up borders by July. Though, still too early to be certain.

The PTOs are also waiting for government advisories and CDC/WHO advisories on what they are expected to do for safety measures. Several are already planning on masks, hand sanitizer and social distancing on tour. Each state and country are likely to have different standards that will also have to be met.

Most of the PTOs and, by extension, their partners have extended final payment dates. No one wants to have money that they will eventually have to refund, so they are willing to wait as the world begins traveling again before looking for final payment on trips. It was expressed that our Partner members should also be adopting this extended payment policy. Most PTOs still have the summer on their books, though they are expecting much of that to be rebooked as we get closer. Canada's VIA Rail has cancelled everything through 2020.

Partner CVBs reported that those local restaurants that are reopening are doing so at 50% capacity to allow for social distancing.

## **IV What other ideas do you have to make group travel safer?**

This brought on more questions about the problems if a requirement to wear a mask is ambiguous. What do you do with those who don't wear their mask? Are you permitted to remove the mask at certain times – while eating for example?

There was a general sense that Partners and PTOs should ease up on policies and certainly not put additional restrictions at this time. Make it easy for everyone to travel.