

Visit *people*

# Tourism Recovery after disaster

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Literature Review

Dr Kristine Peters

Jasmin Peters

Nicola Peters

KPPM  
STRATEGY



kristine@kppm.com.au

0409 603 663

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## Introduction

Late 2019 and early 2020 saw unprecedented upheaval in Australia as a result of devastating bushfires and the COVID-19 lockdown. While all sectors have been affected by COVID-19, the tourism industry has been heavily impacted by both events, and it is important to understand more about tourism recovery from crises.

This Literature Review sources relevant material from the academic (peer reviewed) literature and, based mainly on this information (i.e. not including Government policies or strategies, grey (web-based) literature or primary research), proposes actions to support immediate post COVID-19 recovery. The Literature Review is intended to provide information that is not readily available outside of the university sector and therefore should be seen as one element in a range of considerations that underpin policy and sector recovery efforts.

The focus of the literature search is on topics specifically relevant to tourism recovery from natural disasters (especially bushfires) and epidemics (particularly SARS and H1N1/Swine Flu). It is not possible to investigate tourism recovery from pandemics with a similar global economic impact to COVID-19, because the most comparable pandemic was the Spanish Flu (January 1918 to December 1920) which followed – and was arguably accelerated by – the disruption caused by World War I, and which occurred in a period when mass tourism was not possible and at a time when tourism was a very minor contributor to the Australian economy.

Because contemporary tourism has many features that differentiate it from previous periods: low cost mass air travel, Internet-based communication and marketing, and comparatively high levels of discretionary spend across most income brackets; the literature search primarily focuses on articles published in the past decade.

This Review was written during the COVID-19 lockdown, at a time when the period of lockdown was unknown, with speculation ranging from two weeks (US President Trump) to many weeks or months (almost everyone else). The long-term effects of the lockdown are therefore difficult to predict, although many thought-leaders are proposing that the global impact, the need to refocus on essential purchases rather than discretionary consumerism, the imperative of climate change action, and restrictions on visiting friends and family will re-set our values and create a corresponding behavioural shift, illustrated by the following statement issued by Prof Ron Martin, President of the Regional Studies Association<sup>1</sup>:

*The Coronavirus pandemic is spiralling the world into multiple and related crises: health, social and economic; while at the same time the threat of increasing climate change continues to mount. It is very unlikely, when the pandemic is over that social and economic life will simply return to its pre-pandemic state – nor should it: how we organise our lives and our social and economic systems will need to be rethought. The importance of properly funding health and social services, of reducing social and spatial inequalities in incomes and welfare, of reorganising supply chains and production systems to make them less geographically fragmented and less fragile, of making future economic growth both more inclusive and sustainable, these all, it is to be hoped, will become key imperatives of policy innovation. What is certainly clear is that the impacts and consequences of the current crises will vary not only between countries, but also within them, between regions, cities and localities, thereby elevating the need for policies that incorporate explicit initiatives that are sensitive and specific to individual places.*



Consequently, this Review does not assume that tourism recovery will revert to pre-disruption conditions. Rather, it starts from the current baseline, i.e. that most tourism businesses are closed or operating at a minimal level, and proposes actions that can be realistically implemented in a lockdown environment and further developed as the economy starts to recover.

This Review presents an overview of the literature relevant to tourism sector recovery from disaster and epidemic, exploration of specific concepts to inform recovery initiatives, and based on these findings, poses actions to assist with recovery of the South Australian tourism industry.

## Summary of the Tourism Recovery literature

*Because this Review is intended to provide a rapid response to the current economic situation, it has not been through a peer-review process, and should be read with this limitation in mind. As the intended audience is non-academic, citations have been simplified to aid readability.*

36 articles were identified as relevant, resulting from a search of keywords, citations and topics. Unless content is highly relevant and the methodology robust, only articles with strong citation levels were included. The content of each paper was then categorised, categories organised, and further research conducted to fill gaps or explore concepts in more detail. Figure 1 shows the number of articles investigated against the primary focus of each article. 28 of these have direct relevance to this paper and are cited in *References*, as is a document published by the South Australian Tourism Commission (29 references in all).

12 of the 36 articles had more than 100 citations, while the majority of the remaining articles had more than 20 citations. 26 articles were published in the last decade, and all but one article have been published since 2000.

Figure 1: Article categories

Category	Number of articles
Bushfire	2
Disease	5
Economic crisis	7
Natural disaster	10
Tourism response	12
TOTAL	36

## Emerging from COVID-19

As discussed in the *Introduction*, the corona virus and its resulting disease COVID-19, are having an enormous and unprecedented global effect on public health and national economies. To date (early April 2020), COVID-19 related illness has not placed undue strain on South Australia's health sector, however our economy – in line with economies all over the world – has felt the effect of business closures and job losses across the tourism, hospitality, arts and 'non essential' sectors (as defined by federal and state governments).

Government stimulus initiatives are expected to alleviate the worst effects of the economic slow-down, but many businesses that service the visitor economy (defined by the South Australian Tourism Commission as all travellers and businesses that benefit directly or



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indirectly from tourism<sup>2</sup>) are closed or only partially operating, and many will not re-open or will function under a different business model when the COVID-19 lockdown is over.

What does the literature tell us about recovery from major crises? Importantly, we need to recognise that the current use of physical isolation as a strategy to prevent the spread of the virus is unprecedented in modern times, although Senbeto & Hon's 2020 study of changes in Hong Kong visitation patterns after tourism crises (see Figure 2) provides a useful typology, suggesting that in worldwide crises, tourists give up travel or economise on some aspects of the visit, while local crises (e.g. bushfires) drive substitution and day trips from home.

Bronner & de Hoog<sup>3</sup> observe that, although tourism spending experienced greater falls than other consumer spending in response to the 2008-2010 recession, little is known about the reaction of consumers to a global economic crisis.

Even so, there are some learnings from previous tourism downturns. The Asian

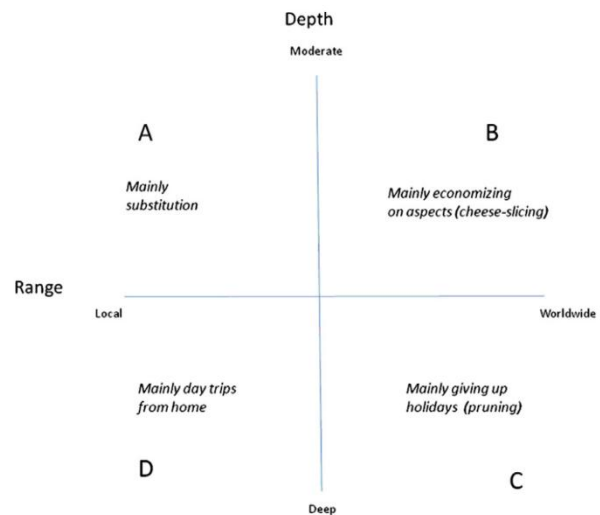
Development Bank reported that the SARS contribution to lost gross domestic product (GDP) in Southeast Asia in 2003 was \$18 billion or 0.6% of the global GDP<sup>4</sup>, and the World Trade Organisation estimated that SARS was responsible for a 9% loss of travel volume in Asia<sup>5</sup>. Similarly, the Global Financial Crisis (GFC) led to a 13% drop in arrivals to OECD countries<sup>6</sup>.

Recent pandemics had markedly different infection patterns compared to COVID-19, hence financial losses were comparatively low<sup>7</sup>. In 2008, the World Bank<sup>8</sup> predicted that the global cost of a bird-flu pandemic would be 3.1% of World GDP, which in 2019 was \$88,081b – resulting in an estimated 2019 cost of \$2,732b. COVID-19 will generate a much more significant disruption than the World Bank's 2008 prediction, with the World Economic Forum\* (in March 2020) estimating that the cost of COVID-19 in 2020 will be at least US\$1t.

COVID-19 also differs from earlier pandemics in the level of global disruption. Page et al. (2012<sup>7</sup>) predict differing effects from pandemics due to variations in dependency on tourism (e.g. tourism contributes 3.1% of Australia's, 2.6% of USA's and 10% of Britain's GDPs<sup>^</sup>), and noted that disasters often lead to displacement whereby demand shifts to other, safer locations. Unlike pandemics, epidemics and natural disasters of the past few decades, COVID-19 travel restrictions, health responses and job losses have affected all developed economies, with very few alternative destinations available.

In purely economic terms, we should not expect tourism to return to the pre-COVID normal. Smeral (2010<sup>9</sup>) reminds us that tourism may recover more slowly compared to other sectors

Figure 2: Relationship between type of crisis and individual tourist reaction.



\* <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2020/03/coronavirus-covid-19-cost-economy-2020-un-trade-economics-pandemic/>

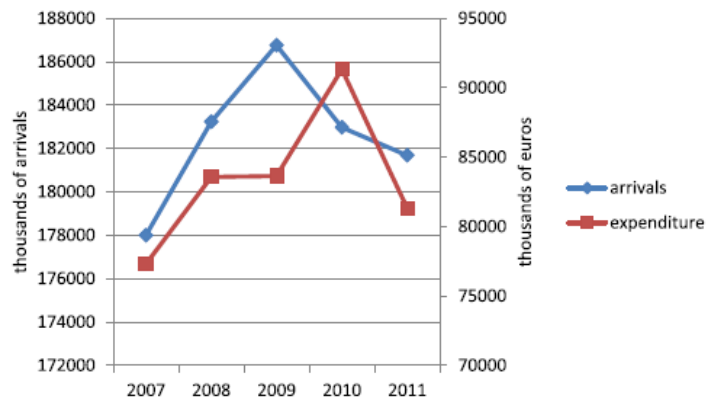
<sup>^</sup> <https://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/Latestproducts/5249.0Main%20Features12018-19?opendocument&tabname=Summary&prodno=5249.0&issue=2018-19&num=&view=https://tradingeconomics.com/united-states/tourism-revenues>  
<https://www.visitbritain.org/visitor-economy-facts>



due to the higher rate of unemployment and subsequent stagnation, both in the tourism sector and more broadly across the economy, with unemployment, job insecurity and reduced savings resulting in households and visitors prioritising necessities, and tourism suffering as a non-essential or luxury spend. Smeral also observes that tourism demand elasticities are asymmetrical, that is the relative fall in tourism demand during a severe economic downturn (due to greater threat to financial and job security) will be steeper than the relative increase in demand during an economic upturn of a similar magnitude.

Campos-Soria et al. (2015) report that, after the Global Financial Crisis, tourism arrivals in Europe recovered more quickly than tourism expenditure and therefore increased visitation may not immediately bring corresponding economic benefit (see Figure 3, Source: Campos-Soria et al. citing Eurostat and WTO<sup>10</sup>).

Figure 3: Arrivals and expenditure



Because of the significant disruption to tourism resulting from government trading restrictions in the tourism and hospitality sectors during the early days of the COVID-19 pandemic, many businesses will fail, while others will operate differently in future: some will depend on online trade, many will be trading at subsistence levels until demand increases, and others will seek new business models that respond more quickly to economic fluctuations. Local offerings – from cafes to music venues – will at first be patchy, with shorter or more targeted hours and a leaner approach to business.

The key to activating local visitor economies will be to increase demand, but (even assuming this would work with the entire world competing for scarce tourism spend) intensive marketing to attract large numbers of visitors may overwhelm the limited resources and capacity of the remaining businesses. Instead, the initial focus should be on visitor segments that can function happily within the constrained environment, and which will spend money in the grass roots businesses (cafes, shops, wineries) that underpin the tourism sector. Similarly, after the total closure of music venues (with many not expected to re-open if travel/social restrictions extend for several months), new venues for live music and entertainment will be needed, presenting opportunities for co-creation of cultural experiences in wineries, cafes, galleries and local pubs.

## Rethinking disease risk

Whether countries that are suffering high levels of COVID-19 infections continue to be perceived as unsafe after the emergency concludes is worthy of consideration. If South Australia can sustain low infection numbers, and be able to promise low-risk travel due to its unique geographical situation and sound health practices, it may be well positioned as an 'early starter location' when travel resumes.



Travel restrictions and the focus on isolation to contain the spread of COVID-19 will consolidate consumer associations between travel, disease and risk. Consumer attitudes are already well established in this regard, with Baker (2015) noting that travel has always been a potent force in the emergence and dissemination of disease, as the migration of humans has been the pathway for infections throughout recorded history. Similarly damaging to travel intentions, COVID-19 has reinforced traveller experiences of the riskiness of air travel, with airports being a locus of attention during this and previous epidemics such as SARS and H1N1 and frequent travellers more at risk [5.11]. Novelli et al. (2018<sup>11</sup>) caution that official travel warnings and sensationalist media coverage also contribute to diminished traveller confidence.

Interestingly, although Visiting Friends and Relatives (VFR) report lower concerns about risk<sup>12</sup>, this group of travellers has a significantly higher risk of contracting travel-related infectious diseases and an increased risk of poor travel-related health outcomes<sup>13</sup>.

Despite perceptions, Rittichainuwat & Chakraborty (2009) find that infectious disease is the cause of death of only 2.4% of Australians traveling abroad (with most deaths caused by tourist ignorance and carelessness), and that as with COVID-19, the perceived risks of SARS had a more devastating effect on tourists' behaviour than the disease itself<sup>14</sup>. While not addressed extensively in this Review, the perception of bushfire risk is also an issue for tourism in non-affected areas, with potential overseas visitors reporting aversion to Australian travel as a result of the intensive coverage of bushfire disasters in the 2019/20 Australian summer (as reported to the Authors during travel in Europe at the time of the bushfires), see separate report.

## What the literature tells us about tourism recovery

As discussed previously in this Review, and widely acknowledged by governments, it may not be possible to return to normal after this period of crisis. Walters & Mair (2012<sup>15</sup>) acknowledge tourism operators' desire to achieve pre-disaster visitor numbers, but caution that there is likely to be reduced supply of tourism product during the recovery period, hence the nature and size of the industry may be entirely different as each shift in supply or demand contributes to a new trajectory for sector development.

## Regional competitiveness

In line with government marketing initiatives, South Australia's visitors are broadly categorised as domestic (Australian) and international (overseas). The post-disaster behaviour of each category is quite different, with Eugenio-Martin & Campos-Soria's (2014) study of European travel after the GFC finding that (even in consideration of the comparatively short European distances) international tourism is less spontaneous than domestic tourism due to bookings being made well in advance of the time of travel; travel to escape harsh climates is strongly linked to particular seasons and destinations; and budget constraints drive interest in new destinations. Eugenio-Martin & Campos-Soria advise that regions with good climates are more likely to switch between international and domestic tourism, while this is not the case for regions with bad climates (who need to escape to warmer locations), and that regions with good climates are more likely to economise by reducing their length of the stay.



Australia's stable socio-economic environment positions us well for secure forward bookings, however we are at a disadvantage in relation to escape from cold northern hemisphere winters, from budget constraints due to the vast choice of well-established and often more cost-effective warm locations closer to major northern populations<sup>16</sup>, and our comparative lack of product density and long domestic travel distances create higher travel costs for international visitors.

*In budget-constrained times, with comparatively low product variety and density, an early focus on attracting VFR travellers is warranted, as this cohort has incentive to visit a specific location (especially as a result of COVID-19 restrictions on visiting friends and family), can take advantage of lower accommodation costs (again with friends and family) and of local knowledge and community connections (to overcome product density disadvantages).*

The downturn in international tourism as a result of this and previous global crises creates greater opportunity to activate domestic markets. Eugenio-Martin & Campos-Soria (2014<sup>16</sup>) note that domestic tourism improves relative competitiveness (because of the difficulty and cost of international travel), helps the economy in production and employment, and addresses leakages (of domestic to international) which have been a feature of Australian tourism in the recent past, with 11.2 million short term visitor returns (i.e. Australians returning from trips overseas of less than one year) in 2018/19\*.

## Safety and security

By nature, tourism is tied to the concept of risk in such a way that tourist behaviour and destination image are significantly influenced by visitor perceptions of security, risk and safety<sup>17</sup>.

Health and safety are a feature of the COVID-19 pandemic, but some regions experience additional challenges that overlay pandemic-related concerns. The disastrous bushfires of the early 2019/2020 summer directly affected many South Australian communities, with significant loss of tourism infrastructure and assets on Kangaroo Island, and costly damage to tourism businesses in the Adelaide Hills and to a lesser degree in the South East of the state.

Even though Australians are accustomed to living with bushfire, this summer has been confronting. For overseas visitors considering Australia as a destination – particularly one that offers a warm climate during the cold northern winter – the pervasive and sensational reporting of the fires gave the impression that the whole of Australia was burning, driving perception that Australia is not a safe destination in summer. Although COVID-19 has provided a distraction from the fires, blanket media coverage of the virus has meant that stories of bushfire reconstruction or recovery achieve no exposure, and it will be difficult to redress bushfire disaster messages when COVID-19 travel restrictions are eased.

Increasing levels of natural threat (e.g. epidemic diseases, natural disasters resulting from climate change), make the issue of security and safety a pressing concern for tourists, with each additional natural disaster adding to the perception of travel risk and negatively affecting

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\* Australian Bureau of Statistics: The main destinations are New Zealand, Indonesia (predominantly Bali and surrounds), USA, UK and China; and the strongest growth is in travel to Asian countries.  
<https://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/Previousproducts/3401.0Feature%20Article2Nov%202019?opendocument&tabname=Summary&prodno=3401.0&issue=Nov%202019&num=&view=>





the intent to travel\*. In response, Chew & Jahari (2014) recommend portraying a more positive and accurate destination image that mitigates perceived risk. The challenge for bushfire-prone areas is how to be honest and accurate in marketing – recognising that many overseas visitors have no understanding of bushfire safety and how it affects tourism and travel activities – while not overworking the level of threat which simply magnifies concerns about risk in volatile destinations<sup>18</sup>.

Fuchs & Reichel (2011) make an important distinction between infrequent and chronically volatile destinations. While Australia is generally seen as safe<sup>^</sup>, the increasing severity of bushfire seasons, and the well-publicised loss of life and property, mean that summer in Australia is shifting from infrequent to chronic volatility. Fuchs & Reichel encourage volatile regions to consider the difference between first time and repeat visitors in terms of destination risk, perception, risk reduction strategies and motives for visiting, with repeat visitors more likely to be pulled back to the destination because their past experience compensates for perceived risk. In order to attract first time visitors to volatile destinations, concerns about ‘big picture’ issues such as human-induced risk (e.g. terrorism, system failure), sociopsychological risk (e.g. social disruption, cultural factors), as well as food safety and weather need to be addressed; while (apart from natural disasters) repeat visitors’ concerns focus more on details such as finances, service quality and car accidents<sup>19</sup>.

Perhaps because the big picture concerns associated with first time visitors can be addressed by friends and family at the destination, Backer & Ritchie (2017) find that VFRs are less concerned about accurate information about the destination, are more willing to travel to such locations, are more likely to be involved with the local population, stay for longer, and consume local food<sup>13</sup>.

## Early-return visitor segments

As suggested elsewhere in this Review, the isolation caused by the COVID-19 travel and contact restrictions will result in a surge of visiting when these restrictions are lifted. This presents the ideal opportunity to encourage VFRs, as the main focus of the visit will be on reuniting families and going out together, and these people will be less critical of gaps in the tourism offering. Senbeto & Hon (2020) support this view, noting that VFR tourism is more resilient when a crisis occurs, and that there were increases in both short-haul and long-haul VFR visits after the 2003 SARS outbreak, the 2015 Avian flu outbreak and the 2008 GFC recession<sup>12</sup>.

Backer & Ritchie (2017) concur with the finding that families are drawn together after a crisis, with VFR a unique form of traveller as they are genuinely connected with the impacted region and can be a source of comfort for friends and relatives in affected areas. In addition, attracting people to the crisis-struck region can provide new income streams to help rebuild<sup>13</sup>.

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\* This review has mainly focused on bushfires as the main natural risk in Australia, however for many people, our ‘bities’ (spiders, snakes, sharks etc.) are of greater concern. On a recent trip to Europe at the height of the bushfires, a Norwegian friend commented: “We love Australia, but there’s no way you’d get me there with all those creatures trying to kill you”.

<sup>^</sup> Baker (2015) reports that tourism studies have consistently found five critical tourism risk factors: (1) War and political instability, (2) Health concerns, (3) Crime, (4) Terrorism, and (5) Natural disaster. Of these, Australia would be considered very safe on all factors except natural disasters.



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Backer & Ritchie suggest three types of VFR visitor (see Figure 4). These typologies are a valuable tool for planning post-crisis marketing and supply-activation:

- PVFRs mainly want to visit, they are less concerned with tourism activities in the region, and more forgiving of supply-side gaps.

- CVFRs also prioritise the visit, but are unable (or unwilling) to stay with their friends or relatives. They are likely to seek accommodation nearby and to expect a minimum standard of tourism activity – including cafes, restaurants, wineries and entertainment.

- EVFRs just want cheap or convenient accommodation and may not spend much time with the family or friends. They expect the full tourism experience on a budget.

Figure 4: Types of VFR

	Accommodation: Friends and family	Accommodation: Commercial
Purpose of visit: VFR	✓ PVFRs	✓ CVFRs
Purpose of visit: Non-VFR	✓ EVFRs	✗ non-VFRs
Visiting Friends and Relatives (VFR) definitional model: PVFRs = Pure VFRs; EVFRs = Exploitative VFRs; CVFRs = Commercial accommodation by VFRs. Source: Backer, 2012.		

As can be interpreted from these typologies and the current COVID-19 situation, first responder visitors are likely to be PVFRs who meet the social connectivity imperative and help to build demand for local services that will in turn support supply-side development. Governments can assist by encouraging locals to be tourists in their own region<sup>8</sup>, thus helping to counter some of the negative publicity associated with a crisis.

As soon as there is enough supply to meet the slightly more demanding needs of CVFRs, this cohort should be the focus of market development. Importantly, many of these will be families of international (particularly Asian) students, which supports demand aggregation that will in turn help to re-establish regular international flights.

EVFRs are likely to be the third wave of VFR visitor, and may play an important part in helping local residents to assess opportunities for development of their own tourism businesses – either in the share economy (e.g. Airbnb) or through other contributions to the visitor economy.

Backer & Ritchie (2017) show that VFR travel is resilient in economic downturns (Backer, 2012b), is associated with repeat visitation (Lee et al., 2005; MacEachern et al., 2007; Scheyvens, 2007) and less susceptible to seasonality than other forms of tourism (McKercher, 1994; Seaton & Tagg, 1995; Hay, 1996; Seaton & Palmer, 1996; Asiedu, 2008; Backer, 2010b; Seaton & Tie, 2015).

In areas that have suffered a natural disaster that directly affects tourism (e.g. Kangaroo Island bushfires), PVFR travellers can be crucial in helping to activate the tourism economy and draw travellers away from population centres – as was the case in Christchurch New Zealand where the 2011 earthquake damaged most of the accommodation and what was intact was needed for emergency relief teams and tradespeople<sup>13</sup>.



Other market segments are important in the early post-disaster period. Echoing the findings of Fuchs & Reigel (see previous heading) and Rittichainuwat & Chakraborty (2009<sup>14</sup>) who find that previous travel experience with a particular destination enhances feelings of safety, Chew & Jahari (2014<sup>18</sup>) suggest that repeat tourists have different cognitive processes in image formation and travel behaviour than first-time visitors and are more likely to act as an effective word-of-mouth reference group or an informal channel of advertising to disseminate positive information about the destination. Ritchie et al. (2010<sup>20</sup>) report that regular visitors (who have visited five or more times in the past) are more likely to return within 6 months of the disaster than irregular visitors (who have visited only once), and – depending on reconstruction – tourists are more likely to return within 12–24 months and that it would be difficult for destinations to encourage new visitors within 12 months. Hence, encouraging return visitors is easier and more productive than seeking new target markets.

Crisis-resistant tourists are also likely to be ‘early returners’ after a disaster and therefore warrant our attention during the immediate post crisis recovery stage. According to Hajibaba et al. (2015<sup>6</sup>), crisis-resistant travellers have exciting lives and are highly involved in travel and related planning activities, are more likely to be young, extrovert, willing to take physical risks, are motivated to travel by opportunities related to sports and health, and are actively engaged in activities such as mountain biking, horse riding and hiking. They do not seek formal travel information, rather use social media and word-of-mouth. Similarly Chew & Jahari (2014) identify young people as risk takers, as they are more short-term oriented, optimistic, and focus on benefits rather than risks – with young repeat tourists most likely to believe that they would not be endangered by sudden events such as natural disasters and may reason that travel to risky destinations during crises is a good opportunity for discounts<sup>18</sup>.

### Economising

One of the most notable features of post-crisis tourism is that travellers economise on costs. This is done via a number of strategies, with Campos-Soria et al. (2015<sup>10</sup>) determining that travelling closer to home was one of the most important. Other cost-saving strategies include shortening the length of stay (generally undesirable for long-haul international travellers to Australia), and choosing cheaper and lower quality accommodation, food and activities<sup>10</sup>. Campos-Soria et al. also observe that, in an economic crisis, tourists are more willing to reduce the length of stay or book cheaper accommodation than taking fewer holidays or changing the time of the year they travel.

Again, VFR presents opportunities for reducing accommodation and domestic travel costs (especially if transport is provided by host families) that in turn releases funds for other elements of the trip such as food, wine and entertainment. Activating spare accommodation for VFR stays may also trigger consideration of involvement in share economy services, thus expanding accommodation options for future travellers.

Discussion of cost should also reflect supply-side quality. Walters & Clulow (2009<sup>20</sup>) reflect that in some instances the product, infrastructure or facility has been damaged or is of lower quality than before the disaster, and price reductions that reflect these changing circumstances may be introduced. It is generally acknowledged that price reductions are not a preferred option as operators are likely to be suffering financially from loss of business, discounting creates a negative image of a low-cost travel destination that may be difficult to change after the destination has fully recovered, and that in terms of destination recovery, visitors are more concerned about personal safety than price promotion<sup>14</sup>.



Given the likelihood of post-crisis economising, price reductions may generate additional visitation in an otherwise difficult situation<sup>21</sup>, but operators should also see the recovery period as a time to address quality and satisfaction issues to deliver improved visitor satisfaction and word-of-mouth promotion<sup>14</sup>.

## Messaging

Walters & Mair's (2012<sup>15</sup>) review of post-crisis marketing identifies that marketing and promotional activities should resume as soon as possible after a disaster. Because tourists base travel decisions on their *perception* of the attractiveness of a destination<sup>18</sup>, crises can tarnish the image of a travel destination and make option evaluation more difficult. Hence, Chew & Jahari (2014<sup>18</sup>) suggest that destination image should incorporate both cognitive (beliefs and knowledge about a travel destination's attributes) and affective facets (emotion or feelings attached to the destination) and that the image should be widely accepted by operators and used to encourage a better understanding of destination. Based on this approach, Chew & Jahari report that destination image is a significant mediator between perceived travel risks and visit intention.

Post-disaster messaging should specifically address perceptions of risk and safety, in particular to defray media misinformation that can damage economic recovery<sup>17</sup>. Ritchie et al. (2010<sup>20</sup>) caution against using 'business as usual' or 'open for business' to counteract media reporting that suggests misleadingly that the entire destination is closed, finding that such messages lack credibility and that visitors do not consider them to be accurate, realistic, or truthful. In their study of the Black Saturday fires, Walters & Clulow (2010, in Ritchie et al.) report that potential visitors were concerned that they would be in the way, or would be intruding on local residents who were preoccupied with the recovery process. Similarly, visitor expectations of the recovery process can deter their intention to re-patronise a destination, and messages that focus on the recovering landscape (e.g. blackened bushfire areas) were not well-received<sup>20</sup>. In summary, post-disaster marketing messages that promote community readiness should be accurate, should demonstrate that visitors would be welcome, and serve as a guide to enjoying the available tourism product in that locality.

We are well aware that effective messaging is adapted to cater for specific market segments. However, market segments that were most profitable prior to a crisis may no longer be relevant, and destination marketers may need to find new target markets and redesign their messages and communication methods accordingly, noting the importance of compatibility with the current needs and wants of the provider or destination<sup>13</sup>.

Segmentation and messaging should therefore be both informed and thoughtfully developed, with Backer & Ritchie (2017<sup>13</sup>) cautioning against responding to industry and government pressure to undertake recovery marketing before the crisis is resolved, without consideration of changing market segments, without involving operators and communities, and without testing messages with actual customers whose intentions and beliefs may have changed significantly as a result of the crisis. This is not to say that planning for post-crisis marketing should be a lengthy process, as it is imperative that visitors return and start spending as soon as the locality is able to provide an acceptable tourism offering. Ritchie et al.<sup>20</sup> recommend an early focus on relationship marketing, whereby operators are encouraged to maintain visitor databases, identify their loyal consumer base, keep customers updated during recovery, and encourage patronage as soon as they are ready to receive visitors. This approach also supports communications between provider and customer that addresses perceived risks,



provides accurate information (and support to enjoy) local product, and helps to adapt the offer to suit emerging customer needs.

In the post COVID-19 period it is possible that the community-spirited feeling that “we’re all in this together” may deteriorate into highly competitive marketing that favours individual businesses over solid regional growth. Governments and regional tourism organisations have an important role in working with businesses across the visitor economy to re-think the regional offering and reposition it within the stronger community/weaker consumerism ethos that emerged during the virus lockdown. This can be achieved through a refocus on relationship marketing that extends to households, encouraging friends and family to reconnect by staying locally and being involved in revitalisation of the local economy. Not only will this redress COVID-19 isolation, VFR tourism will also provide much-needed revenue to local businesses.

Public relations in the early stages of recovery should aim to educate locals, businesses and target markets about the focus of the region’s redevelopment and enlist their support to create a more sustainable future that is less dependent upon frenzied consumption of goods and travel. Smeral (2010<sup>9</sup>) reminds us that the negative economic and social consequences of a crisis will accompany us for a long time and it will be difficult to reduce high unemployment rates to figures that are more socially acceptable. Thus it is important to remind communities that only moderate growth rates should be expected for some time, especially as many visitors are likely to have limited funds.

*As a result of COVID-19 isolation, the new visitor is more likely to want stronger connections, to be part of the local arts and music community, and to help co-create a better, more sustainable future.*

This observation is reinforced by McCroskey (2006, in Rachão et al. 2009<sup>22</sup>) who note the importance of empathy (of seeing things through others’ eyes, of being aware and understanding others’ concerns, or recognising others’ problems and trying to help them) as a potent persuasion tool.

The messages outlined in this section should be incorporated into marketing images. Lehto et al. (2013) remind us that image restoration is a critical part of destination recovery, and active searching for information by intending travellers is a means of reducing risk and improving decision-making<sup>17</sup>. Good online information is therefore an important element in managing perceptions.

## Successful interventions

Governments, and to a lesser degree regional tourism organisations and regional development agencies, can apply policy levers and support ways of working that help regions recover from crises. One of the most important roles is to ensure decisions made at the local and regional level acknowledge the complexity of the situation and contribute to the long-term development of the region, as decisions made under pressure may solve immediate problems but create new challenges going forward. This is especially relevant to engagement and management of the media<sup>11</sup>.

Governments can also apply aid or stimulus packages, and both governments and regional tourism groups can provide information about new markets and market segments and



support businesses to reconfigure products and marketing that cater for these markets, help to identify and apply cost-cutting measures, and manage the perception of risk<sup>11</sup>. Many operators will not immediately understand that their customer base is likely to change, and will simply resume marketing and promotions that were successful before the crisis, which can result in lost time and money and further exacerbate financial difficulties. This Review aims to provide a better understanding of possible changes in the operating environment, and emphasises the importance of disseminating accurate knowledge about post-crisis consumer behaviour and travel attitudes.

South Australia enjoys a sound network of regional tourism and regional development organisations – the social capital ‘institutional thickness’ promoted by Amin & Thrift (1993<sup>23</sup>) – which provides a trusted knowledge dissemination framework (Peters, 2012<sup>24</sup>). Given the likelihood of a ‘new normal’ as a result of COVID-19, this network will be an important factor in helping businesses to reframe and adapt. The successful achievement of the new normal will be the result of several influences, including market attitudes and behaviour, business capacity to supply, and government and regional development leadership.

Bordelon et al. (2015<sup>25</sup>) suggest that recovery planning should use a travel ecology approach, which considers economic growth, social development and ecological sustainability and is developed with community and industry participation, a view echoed by Kato (2018<sup>26</sup>) who reinforces the importance of tourism development as a process of community transformation and empowerment – ensuring that tourism development complements the inherent values of a region, that locals enjoy tourism benefits<sup>25</sup> (including feeling good about their surroundings), and that locals contribute to endogenous growth through new enterprise development<sup>27</sup>.

Governments can also implement policies that address broader market dynamics, such as insurance coverage, guarantees of tourists’ personal safety, transparency of information related to risk incidents, the introduction of surveillance or protection measures<sup>19</sup>, and ensure collaboration when dealing with crises<sup>8</sup>. In view of the drive toward localism<sup>28</sup> experienced during the COVID-19 lockdown, policies that inhibit ‘buy local’, such as limitations on farm gate sales (which make it more difficult for farmers to diversify and innovate), should be examined and addressed<sup>29</sup>.



## Recovery strategies

This section of the Review draws on the findings to propose a response to the current COVID-19 situation that can be activated during the lockdown period. As discussed in the *Introduction*, this Review has not considered government strategies and policies, COVID-19 stimulus measures, or non-academic literature, and readers are encouraged to reflect on these sources when making decisions that result from this Review.

### 1. A new normal

Recovery after the COVID-19 pandemic is unlikely to see tourism return to the pre-pandemic situation. Governments should disseminate this message, and assist operators to understand the emerging economy and be nimble and strategic in their response.

Localism is likely to be a much stronger factor, particularly in the early stages of recovery. Not only will this assist with social reconnection, it is a more sustainable model that supports climate change adaptation.

Social connection will be much more important than in the past – hence the title of this Review “Visit *people*” (rather than places). VFR will be a strong imperative, and connecting visitors to local communities will be an emerging tourism opportunity.

### 2. During the lockdown

COVID-19 travel and contact restrictions, and increased data allowances, have invigorated the use of the Internet for work and social connection. Generally, Australia’s virtual tourism offering is somewhat underdone, so this is an ideal time for time-rich/cash-poor tourism operators to develop new business models and product offerings, and to update or create online tourism experiences and marketing.

Government support via webinars, online resources and extension of digital skill development programs – underpinned by communications that highlight the need for an improved digital presence – will build capacity and new product, and help to address tourism sector confusion and concern for the future.

At the same time, regulators and policy-makers should be examining barriers to local tourism development (e.g. farm enterprises and farm gate produce sales) to support rapid activation of local economies when COVID-19 restrictions are lifted. By supporting new venture creation, governments will build economic confidence that will create new jobs and alleviate some of the downside of business closures.

### 3. Activating immediate recovery

As discussed extensively in this Review, the Visiting Friends and Relatives market is ideally placed to address the social disconnect and tourism challenges resulting from COVID-19. When restrictions are lifted, reconnecting with friends and family will be an immediate priority for many people and strategies that encourage people to shop locally, connect visitors to local activities such as arts and music, and (if the virus is still prevalent) to host visitors with minimum health risk, will encourage behaviours and activities that have maximum positive effect on local economies.



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