

THE INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF BUSINESS & MANAGEMENT

Hospitality and Tourism Sector in Post Covid-19

Inyang O. E

Lecturer, Department of Hospitality and Tourism Management,
Federal University Wukari, Taraba State, Nigeria

Asemanya A. A

Lecturer, Department of Hospitality and Tourism Management,
Federal University Wukari, Taraba State, Nigeria

Makyur O. A

Lecturer, Department of Hospitality and Tourism Management,
Federal University Wukari, Taraba State, Nigeria

Nalkap Turfa

Lecturer, Department of Hospitality and Tourism Management,
Federal University Wukari, Taraba State, Nigeria

Abstract:

The Corona virus (Covid-19) pandemic has brought about the closure of many businesses temporarily while some could remained closed permanently if the situation is not properly handled. But among the most affected are the hospitality and tourism businesses around the world. There is therefore the need for businesses to start preparing for the post covid-19 era, when they can reopen their business. This research was conducted to explore the things hospitality and tourism sector could do to prepare for the post covid-19 era. The paper reviewed opinion of experts and professionals in the industry using mainly desktop survey and explorative research method. It was found that there were diverse opinions on how the sector should prepare for the post covid-19 era but quite unanimous agreement on the fact that the hospitality and tourism sector must embraced enhanced health and safety changes to prepare for the post covid-19. The paper therefore conclude that a post covid-19 recovery plan with emphasis on infectious disease prevention is necessary and recommended that hospitality and tourism businesses should develop a post covid-19 health policy by re-evaluating their general business operation to capture the current health realities like physical distancing, use of face mask and frequent disinfectants of frequently touched surfaces among others. The post covid-19 plan could be segmented into the preparation, response and recovery phases to achieve a sustainable business reopening and growth. Government should also come up with post covid-19 economic plan which should among others set general health and economic guidance including stimulus packages to help businesses recover from the pandemic.

Keywords: Post Covid-19, hospitality and tourism sector, recovery plan

1. Introduction

As the novel Covid-19 continue to ravage the world 7 months after it was first confirmed in Wuhan, China in 31 December, 2019 (WHO, 2020), the hospitality and tourism sector has obviously become one of the most affected by the pandemic. This is why The World Travel and Tourism Council warned that the COVID-19 pandemic could cost up to 50 million jobs universally in the hospitality and tourism industry. The recovery time can take up to 10 months. For emerging destinations like those in Africa and Nigeria in particular, it could take well over a year. (WTTC, 2020)

Furthermore, it is estimated that the 2020 global international tourist arrivals in Africa and Nigeria in particular could decline to between 1% to 3%. This could translate into a loss of \$30 to \$50 billion in spending by international visitors. The Asia and the Pacific region are expected to be the most affected. But Africa is equally expected to suffer, perhaps even worse (WTTC, 2020).

It is also very obvious that hospitality and tourism attractions have closed almost all over the world. Hotels are operating at single digit occupancy rates and in some cases have closed down. Countries have closed their airspaces, and food and beverage businesses are mostly at a halt as a result of social distancing guidelines. This has resulted in massive lay-offs and workers being furloughed. Governments have also seen a loss of revenue and foreign exchange majorly from these hospitality and tourism businesses within this period.

According to the (WHO, 2020) China, the US and Europe are the largest generating markets for Africa's tourism. These countries are also among the hardest hit by the pandemic. These countries have in place partial and complete lockdowns as well as other travel restrictions. Which is why the impact on the tourism sector in Africa and Nigeria in particular is expected to be far reaching, and long lasting given that it will take time for them to recover (WHO, 2020).

COVID-19, also known as Coronavirus, is a new strain of infection that emerged at the end of 2019 and has since spread to almost all countries of the world, with more than 9 millions confirmed cases, more than 400,000 death's with about 5

millions recoveries around the globe as of the end of June, 2020 according to the World Health Organisation daily situation report (WHO, 2020). Nigeria has more than 20,000 confirmed cases, about 7000 plus persons discharged with more than 500 recorded deaths from the virus within this same period according to the Nigerian Center for Disease Control (NCDC, 2020). Since the first identified case in Wuhan China, the virus has rapidly spread across the globe and was declared a pandemic on the 11 of March, 2020 by the World Health Organisation. Since then, different countries have taken drastic measures to control the spread of the virus as nationwide quarantine and eventual shutdown, closure of shops, bars, restaurants and non-essential services became the norms.

Many experts in the sector, (Chinazzi, M., Davis, J., Ajelli, M., Gioannini, C., Litvinova, M., Merler, S., & Viboud, C., 2020., IoH, 2020), agreed that life can no longer be the same again compare to pre covid-19 era and that businesses most importantly those in the hospitality and tourism sector need new approaches and ways of doing things for them to survive in the Post covid-19 era. Most pertinent is also the fear or realization that covid-19 might not easily go away but might be around for a longer period just like other perennial diseases as predicted by the World Health Organization. This now calls for swift changes in the way businesses generally and the hospitality and tourism sector in particular should operate. Some of the suggestions by experts and professionals in the sector on post covid-19 hospitality and tourism sector are reviewed below.

2. Post Covid-19 Hospitality and Tourism Sector as Seen by Different Experts

There are diverse views by experts (Chinazzi, M., Davis, J., Ajelli, M., Gioannini, C., Litvinova, M., Merler, S., & Viboud, C., 2020) on how the hospitality and tourism sector can prepare and navigate the post covid-19 era. What seems to be certain is that every aspect of the sector will have to change and adapt to the new normal of doing business.

These experts believe that hospitality businesses should have clear cancellation indications policies where guests can decide to amend or change their reservations in accordance with health situations surrounding their movement. They also suggest pre arrival registration that can be operated over an online platform. Starwood and Hilton, are examples of some of the companies operating with Bluetooth and RFID technology (Chinazzi, M., Davis, J., Ajelli, M., Gioannini, C., Litvinova, M., Merler, S., & Viboud, C., 2020). Now-a-days authorization over a mobile phone has become very important. This can be done voluntarily or mandatorily. Singapore is now acting as a company that is using QR app Trace Together. This creates a huge advantage to trace someone having symptoms. Hence, this is extremely helpful in COVID 19 pandemic situation. Many places like hotels, where many people have to work together, this gives real benefit.

To fulfill the concern of hygiene, automatic electric doors will be preferred over push/pull. Wiping of door handles and lift buttons with disposable wipes frequently have become expectations of guests. Proper disposal of any used wipes also needed. Guests need the facility to use their own disposable wipes and proper bin to throw it.

Stress on cleanliness and sanitization have become mandatory in the post covid -19 era. Boosting the confidence of guests that they are living in a risk-free zone has become a challenge for this industry (Chinazzi, M., Davis, J., Ajelli, M., Gioannini, C., Litvinova, M., Merler, S., & Viboud, C., IoH, 2020).

More safety related measures like standard handshake has become less attractive. Traditional Namaste has now become a way of greeting. Many other styles like Japanese style nod also have become popular. Spacing between tables or making arrangement of sitting of guests in different rooms has become necessary in this pandemic situation. A one stop delivery has become appreciable as many guests may not like frequent visits of staff for additional sauces, condiments and service related facilities (Chinazzi, M., Davis, J., Ajelli, M., Gioannini, C., Litvinova, M., Merler, S., & Viboud, C., 2020., IoH, 2020).

Buffet meals and breakfast services have become more acceptable compared to table service. Buffet services also help to pick up personal service utensils. But post Covid-19, buffets may not be preferred (Chinazzi, M., Davis, J., Ajelli, M., Gioannini, C., Litvinova, M., Merler, S., & Viboud, C., 2020., IoH, 2020).

In this pandemic situation, disposable utensils are preferred over reusable utensils to avoid transference of the virus. Staff name badges can be incorporated to identify staffs from a distance. South Korea and China are already practicing this. Badges can use traffic light of green and red test result system. Some hotels are providing sanitization proof of frequent use items such as toilet seats and TV remote controls. But disposable facilities are always preferred at this point of time (Chinazzi, M., Davis, J., Ajelli, M., Gioannini, C., Litvinova, M., Merler, S., & Viboud, C., 2020., IoH, 2020).

Ordering of foods through apps like UberEATS or Deliveroo have become popular over public dining room service. Aparthotel group in Australia has been partnered with Deliveroo. They will operate more extensively over post Covid-19 in cities (Chinazzi, M., Davis, J., Ajelli, M., Gioannini, C., Litvinova, M., Merler, S., & Viboud, C., 2020., IoH, 2020).

3. Conclusion

In conclusion therefore, there is a need for hospitality and tourism businesses to develop a post covid-19 and general infectious disease policy guide which should be part of the general health and safety policy but a separate, easy to read document displayed conspicuously for customers to see. In line with government policies of easing lockdown and reopening of economic activities around the world, the hospitality and tourism sector in Nigeria particularly need not be left in the back but should use some of these suggestions to build back businesses and start the post covid-19 era. In this sense, the post covid-19 era should not be looked at as a period where there is complete elimination of the covid-19 disease but rather a period where businesses learned to adapt and operate side by side with the virus without much harm from the virus, while waiting for effective treatment and possible vaccine. Businesses generally need to operate but this time not in the usual care free attitude of operators and customers but in a more informed and health conscious environment for the continuous progress of the society.

4. Recommendations

In view of the above, this paper recommend that in the post covid-19, it is important for each business to develop their post covid-19 recovery strategy/plan in line with their peculiar operations working with emergency management experts rather than simply copying general guides which might not help much in their situation. The below recommendation therefore serves only as a guide and should not be seen as exhaustive list of things that should be in the plan.

4.1. Post Covid-19 Preparation Phase

In the preparation phase, hospitality and tourism sector must re-evaluate its activities in line with current realities as present by the covid-19 pandemic. Hospitality and tourism industry must take measures to reopen by fighting against covid-19 pandemic. What are the things put in place to prevent the spread in the organisation and what strategies for effective response should there be a reported case within their enclave? So as to have a quick and effective control of the spread in a way it will not disrupt business operation.

The answers to some of these questions by the hospitality and tourism businesses will reveal their readiness to reopen and continue in business. For example, hospitality and tourism must have a reliable screening method in place to swiftly identify possible carrier of the virus among those with visible symptoms and asymptomatic patients too. Also, there must be a system in place to discourage physical and social contact of customers among many others.

4.2. Post Covid-19 Response / Mitigation Phase

The response phase of the post covid-19 crisis management is set to be continuous and can be combined with the mitigation phase because some of the response measures will serve as prevention and mitigation. In this way, hospitality and tourism businesses must continue to show response activities which could include activities that can be seen to keep the virus at bay and reduce large scale effects on the businesses. Some examples of response activities by the hospitality and tourism businesses could include continuous disinfection of business premises and making sure that guest and customers followed social and physical distancing practices and use face masks appropriately.

There is also the need for hospitality and tourism businesses to established and maintain the physical presence of health and safety officers who will enforce some of these principles in a professional manner without making the guest and customers feel harass and embarrass. Furthermore, should testing for the virus be affordable and fast, hospitality and tourism businesses like Hotels, Lodges, Airlines and Cruise ships etc. should request for customers to submit covid-19 test result as part of requirement to be accepted into the facilities or rendered required service.

The response phase will also include rigorous advertisement in promoting mostly some of these enhanced health practices that has been put in place for the safety and protection of intended customers. This will go a long way in strengthening customer's confidence in such places.

These are some the response/mitigations activities that hospitality and tourism businesses should put in place in the post covid-19 era.

4.3. Post Covid-19 Recovery Phase

All that have been said in the preparation, response/ mitigation phases are to achieve recovery. Recovery is the process of bringing hospitality and tourism businesses back and achieved sustainable operation. So, it could be said to be subsumed in the preparation and response phases and could be measured in kick starting of business operation, sustaining of customers patronage and building of profits. The recovery phase also include the monitoring of progress of activities put in place and re-evaluating target objectives as per its achievement as well as review of these.

5. What the Government Should Do

The government needs to set out general post covid-19 policies for businesses to adopt and modify in accordance with their individual peculiarities. Also, government should prepare stimulus packages for the hospitality and tourism industries. For example, some tax could be relaxed and interest rate for business loan lowered among others.

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