



March 26, 2020
To: SLHTA Members

Subject: SLHTA Membership Update on COVID-19

"This is the time for facts, not fear. This is the time for science, not rumors. This is the time for solidarity, not stigma. We are all in this together"
– Dr Tedros, Director-General of the World Health Organization

Dear Members,

The last 7 days have seen a dramatic worsening of the effects of COVID-19 on a global scale, from a health and economic perspective.

In March 12, we had reported to you that there had been 118,381 confirmed COVID-19 cases in 114 countries, with 4,292 deaths recorded. As of March 26, these figures now have reached over 416,000 cases in over 190 countries with 18,589 deaths recorded.

It is therefore paramount, that we stand united to safeguard the health of our citizens first and above all. The SLHTA is in contact with the Chief Medical Officer to assist her and her department wherever possible. We appeal to our own members to do what they can to encourage those around them for an adoption of the prescribed hygiene procedures and adhering to physical distancing measures.

In regard to the global economy, the tourism industry is one of the worst hit, with 75 Million jobs at risk worldwide. Here in Saint Lucia, tourism activity directly employed and supported approximately 14,000 workers and their families, but the trickle-down effect and financial benefits of tourism activity reached far beyond. In fact, as a collective, tourism related industries account for 37.7% of persons employed in Saint Lucia and the direct contribution of travel and tourism to the country's GDP stood at 42% in 2018 according to WTTC.

With the cruise industry having suspended operations and with international and local travel bans in place, all cruise passenger and stay-over tourism activities have now ceased entirely. This has forced tourism businesses to close and lay off their workforce. Whilst some businesses have indicated that they would be ready to re-open by ending of April/Mid May, it has to be



P.O. Box 545, Castries
2 Alfiona Plaza, Rodney Heights, Gros Islet, St. Lucia
Tel: (758) 453 1811 / 452 5978 • Fax: (758) 452 7967
slhta@slhta.com • www.slhta.com



acknowledged that it is extremely difficult to forecast when a re-opening will in fact be feasible, since the precise course of the COVID-19 spread cannot be clearly foreseen. There is indication that a recovery may not take place until the late fall. As previously noted, business interruption policies do not cover businesses in a pandemic, many tourism businesses are forced to make large refunds to pre-paid, now cancelled clients whilst at the same time having to fear that their own accounts receivables from trade partners will not be paid promptly or not at all.

To describe the situation as anything but catastrophic at this time is therefore not possible. Despite that, we appeal to all members to not feel defeated and believe in the resilience of our people. We are in this together and together we will find a way forward not just for the industry but for the country. We need to look out for each other and our communities, scale down our daily exposure to news on social and other media and focus on remaining calm. As you may have heard the Chief Medical Officer say, please refrain from distributing information that is not from an official channel.

The SLHTA's immediate concern is for the laid off workforce in our industry and together with our other private sector organizations representing all aspects of our economy, we have appealed to the Government of Saint Lucia to announce an unemployment benefit scheme for the next 20 weeks, as soon as possible to alleviate fears and anxiety and help retain a sense of calm. The SLHTA in this regard has written to the Ministry of Labour and offered some practical solutions, and also, provided a number of recommendations under the headline **Displaced Employee Assistance Program (DEAP)**. Some of the recommendations included support by GOSL for the medical insurance for displaced tourism workers, extend layoff period to 20 weeks and ensure that layoffs do not interrupt displaced employee's tenure with the employer, counselling hotline to be established for displaced employees needing counseling and guidance support, discounts on medication, Adopt a Family Program, deferral of utility payments and grocery vouchers among others.

We acknowledge the critical importance of entertainers, arts and crafters, licensed beach vendors, tourism transportation operators and other micro, small and medium enterprises which depend heavily on the tourism industry for their livelihoods. To our mind, these displaced persons should all be sheltered under the Displaced Employee Assistance Program and receive access to its benefits.

The Ministry of Tourism requested that the SLHTA discuss and present recommendations on how to stimulate the economy after the Covid-19 crisis. This document has been prepared and dispatched, after extensive consultation with the SLHTA Board of Directors and some key stakeholders.

Above all, we expressed in all of our letters that as an organization, the SLHTA vows to continue our collaboration with all stakeholders, in an effort to bring solutions to the table and find ways to engage not only with our industry workers but with communities at large all the way to the grass roots level. We want to ensure that in this unprecedented crisis, no one is left behind and recognize our collective duty in this regard.

As a member of the Private Sector Council, the SLHTA will be collaborating with other Private Sector Associations to convene Weekly Economic Review Conversations to continue our assessment of the impact of COVID 19 on our economy and the related challenges. We are hoping to invite key thought leaders to this WERC with intention of sharing experiences and best practices which can aid our economic recovery as quickly as possible.

The SLHTA continues to update link <http://www.slhta.com/coronavirus/> where members can read up on the most important announcements. Members should also note the updates by CHTA on the regional scale which can be found here <http://www.caribbeanhotelandtourism.com/covid-19/> and by the CTO which can be found here: <https://www.onecaribbean.org/resources/coronavirus/>

We want to highlight the JOINT MEDIA RELEASE of THE EASTERN CARIBBEAN CENTRAL BANK AND THE EASTERN CARIBBEAN CURRENCY UNION (ECCU) BANKERS ASSOCIATION, in which it was announced that a financial support programme will be implemented by all member banks in the Eastern Caribbean Currency Union: “ The programme will facilitate a loan repayment moratorium for an initial period of up to six (6) months with a possible extension upon review. In addition to the suspension of loan repayments, a waiver of late fees and charges will be applicable to eligible customers during this period. Each member bank will advise its customers of the details and process for the support programme. Therefore, please contact your financial institution directly for more information.”

Going forward, the SLHTA will convene a number of virtual meetings to look at travel post Covid-19 so that the industry can market and prepare accordingly. Travelers of the future may be perceived and welcomed differently in the World at large and also, our team members and travelers will look for assurances as to how they will be assured of their safety.

There have been many articles about the future of travel and we will share such articles with our members on the www.slhta.com/coronavirus/ page under the title **Future of Travel**. Most importantly, people’s desire to travel has not changed, it has just been put on hold, with the UNWTO’s hashtag emphasizing to #staysafe and #traveltomorrow.

Going forward, we will also discuss with Government the urgent need for a better unemployment scheme, level of healthcare and for our industry, the establishment of our **Hospitality Worker Relief Fund**.

With our Tourism Enhancement Fund, we stand ready and prepared to assist and also we have created an online link titled <https://one.bidpal.net/slhtatefcovid19recoveryfund/welcome> that would allow donations to come forward from the US that are tax deductible. In particular, we hope to address online training programs and webinars to enable our displaced workforce an opportunity to enhance their skill sets from the comfort of their homes, in anticipation of our recovery.

Excerpt from <https://www.ketchum.com/preparing-for-the-future-of-tourism-in-a-post-covid-19-world/>

The new normal

While the exact timeline of recovery is unclear (many predict a possible two- to six-month window) the impact will eventually pass. Once this is all over, people will travel again. However, we need to understand now that the tourism industry will be facing a new post-COVID-19 reality where companies are all vying for the hearts and minds of wary travelers—likely in some form of a sustained economic downturn driven by this crisis.

The new normal will likely include everything from the minutiae of sanitation practices (and consumers wanting to know more about them) to broader topics such as the health of nations/regions/ports-of-call, the role of travel insurance, and issues unique to specific modes of travel (e.g., is social distancing possible in modern air travel)?

Also, as price-sensitive travelers may be looking to trade down on products and amenities, we'll see shorter booking windows, and possibly more trips with lower spends and much briefer itineraries. But there may be more—we need to use this time to begin to anticipate what that new normal might look like and prepare for it.

Major crises like COVID-19 almost always fundamentally change and evolve the status quo. As such, it's not just a matter of getting the tourism industry's engine restarted. Instead, the collective tourism stakeholder ecosystem must understand what has changed, and what will best position the industry to grow together and become a global force once again in the new normal.

We'll be working closely with the industry to help understand and, where possible, define the evolution of post-COVID-19 tourism. We are optimistic that soon enough we'll all be able to—through a different lens—explore the world with newfound appreciation.

Karolin Troubetzkoy
President
Saint Lucia Hospitality & Tourism Association
#2 Alfiona Plaza, Rodney Heights, Gros Islet
P.O Box 545, Castries



P.O. Box 545, Castries
2 Alfiona Plaza, Rodney Heights, Gros Islet, St. Lucia
Tel: (758) 453 1811 / 452 5978 • Fax: (758) 452 7967
slhta@slhta.com • www.slhta.com

