



26<sup>th</sup> August 2020

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Dear Dr Belmar-George,

We wish to once more congratulate you and your team on the successful management of the pandemic so far.

As an association, we understand fully the importance of strict overview and management of protocols to continue to keep the risk level low. Also, we understand why the situation in our source markets, in particular the U.S.A. would have prompted an extension of Phase 1.

We are grateful that we are now able to offer scuba diving as an added activity, permit clients to stay at more than one COVID-19 certified hotel and also, we are encouraged by the ongoing discussions with sites and attractions.

However, given the great diversity of members represented by the SLHTA, it would be remiss of us to not highlight that the extension of Phase 1 and the restrictions that are still coming with this phase are causing not only tremendous concerns but they also affect the economic survival of some of our member businesses.

The SLHTA has commenced an in—depth review of the membership so that we may derive a position and recommendations from this. From destination management companies, small hotels and villas to independent wedding planners, there is an urgent need to find a way forward if we want to save businesses and preserve livelihoods.

Because of the complexities of the subject matter, rather than attempting a summary document to share with you, we wanted to get the ball rolling and forward to you some comments and recommendations we received today from Sanovnik Destang, on behalf of Bay Gardens Resorts.



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We felt it was important to showcase what their thoughts are and whilst the SLHTA has not had an opportunity to complete our review and present our association's position, we know that Bay Gardens is not the only member hotel with such concerns.

We are including below what we received from Bay Gardens. We are looking to you to let us know in what format we should continue our dialogue.

We suggest a number of online exploratory meetings, for our members to share their concerns and thoughts with you.

## **COMMENTS FROM THE BAY GARDENS HOTEL GROUP:**

### **Concerns about Phase 1 Restrictions – St. Lucia**

1. Requirement for guests to remain on property
  - a. Concern – we understand that guests in the initial phase would be required to remain on property and would only be able to book coastal tours and dive and certain water based attractions. This is however not sustainable. We appreciate that there was a need to extend Phase 1 due to the increased risk in our major source markets. However it is possible as has been shown in other destinations to mitigate the risk of covid-19 infection while still allowing guests to participate in excursions on island.
  - b. Recommendations

We should continue to require a negative PCR test on arrival for all guests as is currently being done and continue with screening protocols at borders and on property.

During Phase 1 and 2, guests from regions with active community spread should continue to be required to remain on property and limited in their movement with respect to tours and attractions. However, these guests should be allowed to test (at their cost) again while on island and if a negative PCR test result is obtained within 5-7 days after arrival, they should be allowed to enjoy the island and its restaurants and attractions while following protocols that are being followed by locals, visitors from within the Caribbean Bubble as well as yachties. We would need to come up with a definition for what level of infections is considered “high risk” or indicative of active community spread (vs sporadic cases within confined areas). Barbados has definitions that we can review. <https://www.visitbarbados.org/covid-19-travel-guidelines-2020>

## 2. Extension of Phase 1 to October 5

- a. Concern - While we understand the decision process behind it is very concerning that there is no clear guidelines as to what triggers would be required for us to feel comfortable moving into Phase 2. This is causing significant concern for many sectors including tours and attractions, restaurants and alternative accommodation providers who are uncertain which phase they fall into and what it would take for them to be allowed to operate.
- b. Recommendations –

That we jointly determine what our risk tolerance is and determine what level of imported cases, incidents of community spread etc is “acceptable” for us in light of our resource constraints. We are still not clear on these metrics in the private sector and it would be very helpful to know conclusively what our capacity is. It will help put the current situation into perspective but it will also help us determine how we can help boost capacity (perhaps through the TEF).

That the private sector be allowed to propose ways in which attractions and restaurants and other providers can operate safely in this environment while balancing health and safety as well as livelihoods. There are lots of protocols for all of these sectors that are in use all over the region and we would like to take the lead in making recommendations that must be reviewed and approved by the MOH (as was done for twin center vacations and others)

That it be made clear (with appropriate justification) what sectors are being considered for each phase. If there is a recommendation from the MOH to not allow a sector to start operating in Phase 2, we would like clear rationale for the reason for same and an indication of what protocols would need to be put in place as the reality is that no sector can wait for there to be no risk of covid-19 to operate. It has been mentioned several times by both the public and private sector that we will need to learn to coexist with covid and the impacted sectors now want an opportunity to indicate how they can coexist. Again final approval comes from the MOH/CMO

## 3. Restrictions of the local (staycation) and Caribbean Bubble

Concern –while there is no documented protocol on this, there is an expectation that hotels who are covid-19 certified are not allowed to receive guests from the local or Caribbean Bubble markets.

This creates several problems and inconsistencies

- i. It has been shown based on data from the SLTA that more than 60% of travelers from these markets prefer to stay in traditional accommodation types. While the demand for villas etc is high, many of these same villas are also trying to obtain certification as covid-19 certified properties and there are already concerns being raised that the lack of accommodation options is constraining economic activity from this market and hampering the success of the Bubblecation promotion.
- ii. It is not very easy to segment a tourism product between international visitors and local. Locals patronize hotel restaurants, do day passes, weddings, conferences etc that are important sources of ancillary revenue for many hotels (particularly locally owned, smaller properties). At the same time alternative accommodation providers and guest houses are not able to generate enough revenue from the staycation/bubblecation market to cover incremental operating costs. To be able to survive the next few months, traditional hotels need to be able to target the local and Caribbean Bubble market and alternative accommodation providers need to be able to target the international market. The strict separation of these two markets will lead to both sectors being uncompetitive and moreover constrain demand and lead to a loss of business to other destinations.
- iii. The messaging that covid-19 certified hotels are inherently dangerous environments that locals or Bubblecationers should avoid is not consistent with the recent research on the likelihood of contracting covid-19 in a hotel environment. <https://www.businessinsider.com/are-hotels-safe-coronavirus>; <https://www.healthline.com/health-news/covid-19-hotels-airbnb-safety>. Moreover this messaging and the stigma it might create will not be easy to roll back once we inevitably decide to relax this restriction. It also creates an inconsistency as one might wonder if a covid-19 certified hotel is unsafe for local patrons, is it not also unsafe for local hospitality workers who may in fact have more interaction with clients?
- iv. The Caribbean Bubble was recently updated to exclude Trinidad which is our largest source of arrivals from the English speaking Caribbean. This therefore means that hotels or other accommodation providers who opt to target this market exclusively will derive limited benefit (Barbados and OECS only)
- v. It would appear that this restriction is meant to remain in place for Phase 1 and Phase 2 which creates a lot of uncertainty for both hotels and consumers as it is not clear when local or regional clients will be allowed to enjoy hotels and other facilities again. It is inconsistent with what is being done in other islands and for that matter around the world. We are not aware of any restrictions that prevent residents of a country from patronizing hotels or that attempts to segment access to hotels to persons from particular countries.

b.

Recommendations

- i. Given that all guests coming in are required to present a negative PCR test, given the protocols in place at covid-19 certified properties (physical distancing, temperature checks, health screening, sanitation, contactless guest service etc) it is recommended that hotels who are covid-19 certified be allowed to accept guests from international markets as well as locals and clients from within the Caribbean Bubble. Adherence to protocols and contact tracing will be key and protocols can be put in place (and some cases are in place) for contact tracing of local clients who come to hotels, restaurants etc. With the adherence to protocols and physical distancing in particular the risk of infection from other guests is greatly mitigated and very low. Frequent inspections should continue to be done to ensure that protocols are being adhered to by hotels, staff and their guests (local and visitor).

It is also important to note that since the reopening of tourism in the Caribbean region almost two months ago, there have been few (if any) documented instances of transmission from visitors to the local population that has led to a community outbreak. The majority of imported cases have originated from returning nationals and St. Lucia's protocols in particular have greatly limited the risk due to the quarantine and testing protocols for returning nationals. St. Lucia's success in containing COVID-19 has been well documented and has led to a revision of our risk outlook by the US CDC and to be in an enviable position as the only Caribbean island in the Level 1 category. For this we are extremely grateful to the CMO/MOH offices. Our pre-testing, screening, quarantining protocols are working and I believe that implementing the above recommendations will not put undue stress on the system or lead to any significant increase in the risk of community transmission of Covid-19.

Yours sincerely



KAROLIN TROUBETZKOY

President

St Lucia Hospitality and Tourism Association

CC: Sanovnik Destang – Bay Gardens Hotels