

Stewards of THE FUTURE

By Matthew Landkamer

I don't want to speak too soon, but it looks like we've just rounded the corner on the pandemic and its economic fallout. As of May 24, 2021, case counts have dropped 38% over the past two weeks [1], 49% of the population has had at least one vaccine shot [2], and the Biden Administration has set a goal of getting at least a first dose into the arms of 70% of Americans by July 4.

Four Actions to Foster RESILIENT DESTINATIONS



“Don't call it a comeback; I been here for years.” —LL Cool J



Meanwhile, the economic forecast says we might be poised for a rapid bounce-back in the tourism industry. Tourism Economics is forecasting 23.2% growth in 2021 followed by another 25.5% in 2022 [3]. That represents compounded growth of 54.6% over the next two years. American Express is also bullish on travel growth, expecting consumer travel spending in the fourth quarter of 2021 to be about 70% of 2019's fourth-quarter spending. [4]

This kind of growth is only possible because we're starting so low. Nevertheless, it offers a profound moment of opportunity for destinations. Consumer preferences and priorities have shifted during the pandemic and as the pent-up demand for travel comes online, every destination has a chance to re-think its target visitor and potentially even pick up market share by the time we reach a new homeostasis.

Taking advantage of this opportunity will require nimble plans that stabilize your destination and address recovery over the next 12-18 months. At the same time, this past year has driven home the fact that destinations need to be doing the longer-term work of building resilience. The good news is that you can do both at the same time.

While we've historically recommended that our travel & tourism clients think in terms of three-year planning windows, we're now often recommending a new model—one that sets a course toward a longer-term ideal while building in responsive near-term strategies and more frequent updates. We haven't changed our minds on destination stewardship—we still believe it is the future of the destination organization—but the planning framework that supports that worldview has been informed by this tumultuous year.

In today's context, planning should:



SET LONG-TERM STEWARDSHIP GOALS:

As the proverb goes, “The best time to plant a tree was twenty years ago. The next-best time is now.” Thinking long-term about how your visitor economy will meet the quality-of-life needs of your residents while protecting the assets and environment that make it a draw in the first place is key to building a sustainable destination.

ASSESS YOUR RESILIENCE:

I don't think I need to make the case for resilience after 2020. This is a long-term play: you'll be able to implement some things immediately, but other things will take some time to work through. We've been collaborating with our friends at Miles Partnership to develop a simple assessment that can help destinations highlight where they have resilience gaps, pointing them toward actions they can build into their strategic and marketing plans to address them.

PLAN FOR THE TURNAROUND:

With long-term stewardship goals and an understanding of resilience gaps in-hand, you'll be able to plan for the next 12-18 months. These strategies need to be informed by a deep assessment of the current state and be agile enough to pivot when you see changes in your leading indicators. They should identify short-term gains that stabilize the destination and enable achievement of those longer-term goals you've set.

RINSE & REPEAT:

Because the active planning horizon is shortened, you'll need to do more frequent updates. But you won't need to reinvent the wheel each time, either—because you have those long-term stewardship goals set, you'll merely be revising and updating your strategies as the external landscape changes and as you accomplish your strategies.

Taken together, this approach gives you the best of both worlds:

A longer-term horizon and goals for true stewardship with agile, responsive strategies in the near-term. If you're going to take full advantage of the speedy recovery we're anticipating, this is how you'll want to prepare. Contact us at travel@coraggiogroup.com to learn more about our new planning model and how it can help your destination.

[1] [nytimes.com/interactive/2020/us/coronavirus-us-cases.html](https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2020/us/coronavirus-us-cases.html)

[2] [nytimes.com/interactive/2020/us/covid-19-vaccine-doses.html](https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2020/us/covid-19-vaccine-doses.html)

[3] ustravel.org/system/files/media_root/document/Research_Travel-Forecast_Summary-Table.pdf

[4] [skift.com/2021/01/27/amex-expects-to-see-a-rush-of-people-to-travel-this-summer/](https://www.skift.com/2021/01/27/amex-expects-to-see-a-rush-of-people-to-travel-this-summer/)