



TIAC Industry Briefing: Coronavirus – Impact on Tourism

February 5, 2020 2:00pm EST

Via teleconference

Minutes

Introductions

TIAC President and CEO Charlotte Bell made brief remarks introducing presenters from Global Affairs Canada, Public Health Agency of Canada, Destination Canada and Greg Klassen from Twenty31 Consulting. She thanked everyone for joining our call. With over 50 organizations on the call, she advised that there would be no roll call and asked that participants identify themselves if asking questions or providing comments. Charlotte then introduced the 4 speakers.

Dr. Barbara Raymond - Centre for Emergency Preparedness and Response, Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC)

Francois Rivest (and team) - Greater China Division, Global Affairs Canada (GAC)

Maureen Riley (and team) – Destination Canada

Greg Klassen - Twenty31 consulting

Update from the Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC)

Dr. Raymond started with an overview of the novel coronavirus outbreak. On December 31, 2019, China reported a cluster of pneumonia cases with unknown cause. The cause was shortly after confirmed by Chinese health authorities to be what is now called the 2019 novel coronavirus (COVID-19). It is one of seven coronaviruses known to infect humans and is in the same family of viruses as SARS and MERS. The first cluster of 41 cases has grown significantly with over 24,000 cases in China (as of Feb. 5. 2020). The severity of illness ranges from mild to severe, with more milder illnesses than severe.

There have been 217 cases of novel coronavirus infections and two deaths identified in 27 countries outside mainland China related to the virus, but so far, it is fairly contained. Canada had identified 5 cases at the time of the call. In these cases, and the vast majority of cases outside of mainland China, those who are ill have traveled from or have been in close contact with a traveler from the Hubei region.

There have been exceptional measures in China and many other countries to contain spread of the virus. China has implemented vigorous control measures including quarantine, stringent infection prevention and control, reduction of transportation schedules. Some countries are banning inbound travel from China or imposing quarantines on travelers from China. **This is not currently the policy in Canada.** On

the 31st of January, 2020 novel coronavirus was declared a Public Health Emergency of International Concern (PHEIC) by the World Health Organization (WHO).

Dr. Raymond emphasized there is still a lot of learning to be done regarding the virus as the situation and understanding of the illness itself evolves.

PHAC has been watching this closely since December 31st, especially given the close ties with Canada and China. Canada has not denied entry to visitors, but has put in place enhanced screening at the border, and information handouts are being provided to travelers arriving in Canada from Hubei province. [Update: now advising these travelers to self-isolate for 14 days since their departure from Hubei province, and contact local public health authority within 24 hours, and providing information handouts to travelers from China to self-monitor for symptoms and contact local public health if they experience symptoms.]

Q+A with PHAC

When will this public health emergency be deemed to be over? What are the conditions needed to declare the emergency over?

- Dr. Raymond said that 'two incubation periods' without new cases reported is the typical timeline to declare an outbreak 'over'. This would mean approximately 28 days given current knowledge of the virus. However, she believes that this may go on for some time, especially in China. She also noted that the population size and density in China are significant contributors to the spread.

What measures are in place to combat false negative reporting of the virus?

- Dr. Raymond stated that self-reporting/self-identification of travelers who develop symptoms show that the system for screening is working and travelers are aware of the things they should do to prevent the spread of illness. The Public Health Agency of Canada's National Microbiology Laboratory conducts confirmatory testing for all specimens tested at the provincial/territorial level for coronavirus.

Update from Global Affairs Canada (GAC)

The Greater China division of GAC headed by Francois Rivest gave an update on the current impacts on the economy. He stated that GAC would go over the on-the-ground situation, and discuss commercial implications.

About 50 million people in China are unable to travel in the hotspots due to restrictions by the Chinese government. Because of Chinese citizens not being able to work, there are significant impacts on travel, exports, and general work in the Mainland.

Many airlines, including Air Canada, have suspended flights to Beijing and Shanghai. Two American airlines have suspended flights to Hong Kong, and there are still many business closures which the government is monitoring. Air Canada is still flying to Hong Kong. China Southern is still operating from Vancouver to Guangzhou.

Chinese importers are, in some cases, cancelling orders because of work difficulties. This could drop China's GDP growth by 2%. In Canada, the main impacts will likely be on tourism and education because of the closures of TEFOL & visa offices.

The travel advisory from Canada says to avoid non-essential travel to China, and may be amended shortly to also advise those in China to leave as soon as possible. Additional guidance is available online.

Q+A with GAC

No questions were asked.

Update from Destination Canada (DC):

Maureen Riley stated that DC is monitoring the impact in both China and other markets where they advertise. Notably, a new winter marketing campaign that was scheduled for launch in China is postponed until further notice. Training modules for Chinese travel agencies have been cancelled, and any travel for events in February have been cancelled at this time. Planned FAMS and media visits scheduled for Feb have been postponed or cancelled and March activities will be assessed on a case by case basis.

DC is applying learnings from past similar issues, and current events to monitor its impacts on DC's activities.

Q+A with DC

Will this impact Rendezvous Canada in May?

- At this point in time there is no way to determine what the situation will look like by Rendezvous in May, but it is being monitored and planned for by both DC and TIAC.

Is DC being proactive or reactive to media, and if approached who is the best point of contact?

- At this point in time, the response is reactive. There have not been significant media inquiries. The provinces have DC's speaking points, but destinations are welcome to reach out to mediarelations@destinationcanada.com for advice.

Practical information and tips for tourism operators

Charlotte Bell introduced Greg Klassen, who has first-hand experience dealing with the SARS outbreak in 2003 during his tenure at Destination Canada. TIAC asked Mr. Klassen to provide industry practical advice in dealing with this outbreak situation based on earlier learnings.

Greg noted that he was part of the Destination Canada team in 2003 during SARS outbreaks in Toronto, and noted some differences between the two. Notably, in 2003 Canada was a secondary 'epicenter' in addition to China. This had a significant impact on the image reputation of Canada that is not present in the current situation. Canada lost 2.5 million visitors as a result and did not recover for more than a decade (though it was acknowledged that other events also affected the slow recovery). The world on the other hand lost only 1-2% of total travel numbers, but recovered quickly by the next year.

In 2003, DC did market research on markets less likely to believe SARs was an ongoing concern in their travel planning, and focused marketing dollars in these areas. This likely mitigated the downside by 2-3%. However, the hangover effect was still significant.

Greg predicts that the aftermath of the current outbreak will not likely dissipate until 6-8 months after the outbreak is considered finished. This is mainly because of the impact of losing both Chinese outbound visitors, and others who are concerned about plane or boat travel. The reporting of the virus, including cruise ship problems and infections reported the day of this call, further suggests to the public that this is a tourism problem.

The main difference this time when compared to the SARS outbreak is that it isn't considered a "Canada problem". The issue is more tourism's reliance of the Chinese traveler and growth of this market. There are also places in Canada that are disproportionately reliant on this market who are already feeling the impacts. This puts us at risk of 400,000 less travelers to Canada. While we are not in tourism's high season, areas that are in their high season are seeing significant decreases in hotel bookings and more cancellations.

Final Remarks

Charlotte asked stakeholders on the call if there is any other information that they need TIAC to provide in addition to current efforts, acknowledging that the situation will continue to evolve.

It was recommended that DC and TIAC work closely with the minister's office to make sure messaging between the federal government and industry are aligned. A lack of alignment in messaging was apparently seen as an issue by the industry during the SARs outbreak. Dave Robinson (Destination Canada) shared that DC and the government are coordinating daily on updates and messaging.

Industry members also asked for help in providing direction for aligning organizations in the industry, that is factual and timely. Charlotte assured that TIAC will continue to post updates, and host calls as the situation evolves.

The call ended at approximately 2:47pm EST.