



DIGITAL TOOLKIT FOR TOURISM BUSINESSES

COVID-19 Recovery Strategies



GW School of Business

Master of Tourism
Administration

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THE GEORGE WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY

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NAVIGATING THE DIGITAL TOOLKIT

Keep an eye out for these important navigation icons throughout the toolkit.



WHAT?

Defines the topic and terminology



HOW?

Explains the implementation process



WHY?

Explains the background and importance



IDEAS & EXAMPLES

Applications for tourism businesses



01

SITUATIONAL OVERVIEW





01: Situation

COVID-19 Disrupts the Travel Industry

- Travel restrictions due to COVID-19 have severely curtailed travel, and will continue to do so for the foreseeable future.
- The latest consumer survey data reveals that openness to travel inspiration and excitement for travel is improving.
- The global pandemic will have a lasting impact on all aspects of travel planning, including destination and accommodation selection, trip type, and travel activities.



01: Situation

Latest Consumer Sentiment

- Increases in coronavirus cases in the United States, and other key source markets, is contributing to a dampened outlook for travel, with no certainty of improvement in the near future.
- About 55% of travelers say that the pandemic will greatly impact their decision to travel in the next six months.
- There is a great deal of pent up travel demand. When consumers identify the activities they miss most while waiting out the pandemic, they consistently rank leisure travel first, with over 60% agreeing that they “can’t wait to start traveling again.”

01: Situation

Latest Consumer Sentiment



Two main trip motivations have emerged for consumers first post-COVID-19 trip: relaxing getaways and visits to friends & family. Of those who are looking for a relaxing getaway, popular trip types will include beaches, resorts, nature, and the outdoors.



According to recent surveys conducted in the US, travelers are more likely to select tourism businesses that communicate a clear cleaning and hygiene plan, that have strong guidelines for staff testing and PPE, and that have strict controls in place for social distancing.



In the aftermath of the pandemic, the new driver of traveler decision-making will be safety. In particular, customers say virus safety measures of the destination are their top concern. Another important consideration is the required use of face masks, as 60% of travelers in a recent survey noted they prefer destinations that require face masks in public.



01: Situational Overview

Embracing Digital Strategies

- As time spent online increases during the pandemic, consumers have more time than ever to explore future travel destinations.
- Sound digital strategies have shifted from helpful to required, as digital channels are now the most effective way to reach potential travelers.





02

CONTENT & MESSAGING



02: Content & Messaging

What are Content & Messaging?

Content: Any written or visual content that a business features on their website, online business listings, and social media channels. Compelling content helps to attract and maintain your audience.

Messaging: How a business talks about itself and values it provides. Defining a messaging strategy is like creating a blueprint for how a business communicates to consumers.



02: Content & Messaging

Messaging Recommendations

TOP 3 MESSAGING THEMES

UTILITY

Help to inform traveler
decision-making

WELLBEING

Keep traveler wellbeing
at the forefront

COMMUNITY

Highlight community
building through the
pandemic



02: Content & Messaging

Messaging Recommendations: Utility

- Travel businesses are the online facilitators of information for destination's reopening; it is important to communicate timely and accurate information about new travel protocols.
- During the pandemic, travelers are often hesitant to book due to the changing nature of travel restrictions. Emphasize flexible cancellation policies at multiple points throughout the customer journey.
- For those that are considering travel, safety is paramount. Travelers are more likely to support tourism businesses which communicate a clear, thorough cleaning and hygiene plan.



02: Content & Messaging

Messaging Recommendations: Utility

Example of tourism business COVID-19 FAQ content that links travelers to official information:

Here are answers to the most frequently asked questions about COVID-19 in Oregon.

How many cases of coronavirus are in Oregon right now?

The best resource for the latest information on COVID-19 in Oregon is the [Oregon Health Authority](#) website.



Links out to official health authority website.

What is Oregon's plan for reopening?

Governor Brown has released an initial "[Reopening Oregon Framework](#)." Details around the Governor's plan can be found on the state's main COVID-19 [website](#).



Links out to official reopening guidance.



02: Content & Messaging

Messaging Recommendations: Wellbeing

- There are two important components to messaging that speaks to the wellbeing of travelers and the greater community at the destination:
 1. Frequently assure travelers that their wellbeing is always top of mind.
 2. Enthusiastically encourage travelers to follow the health and safety protocols established by the destination and by your business.



02: Content & Messaging

Messaging Recommendations: Wellbeing



Example: “Travel Belize” alternates inspirational messaging with reminders about traveler safety & wellbeing. They encourage travelers to explore the country’s certified hotels and tour operators.

Reassuring guests frequently that traveler safety is the top priority will help instill confidence.



02: Content & Messaging

Messaging Recommendations: Wellbeing

Example: Chukka Tours crafts their messaging on social media to encourage visitors to abide by the safety protocols while using their services. They employ hashtag campaigns, such as #lettheprotocolswork.





02: Content & Messaging

Messaging Recommendations: Community

- The coronavirus pandemic has fundamentally shifted the way we live and communicate. In some ways, the crisis has brought us closer together within our communities.
- Consider sharing stories and experiences that highlight community members and tourism businesses working together to endure the crisis.
- These stories of community-building through the pandemic serve to reaffirm with travelers, and locals, what your destination is all about.



02: Content & Messaging

Messaging Recommendations: Community

Example: The 501 Hub in Belize City, Belize. Throughout the pandemic, the restaurant has focused on building community among hospitality businesses in Belize. They launched a digital “gratitude campaign” to share praise for hospitality industry employees, and they have hosted a mini-expo showcasing small businesses impacted by COVID-19.



ADDITIONAL TIPS

- The tone of messaging is critical. Experts suggest striking a tone that is service-oriented, rather than self-promoting.
- Consider the following tones for messaging:
 - Compassionate
 - Authentic
 - Calm





02: Content & Messaging

Content Ideas

- According to a survey conducted by Fuel Travel, **75% of North American leisure travelers** are open to receiving communications from travel businesses.
- The topics they are most interested in hearing about are:
 - *Packages and specials for future stays (65%)*
 - *What the property is doing to protect guests (58%)*
 - *How the Coronavirus is affecting the local area (49%)*
 - *What the property is doing to protect staff (46%)*
 - *The property's COVID-19 response plan (41%)*
 - *Positive stories about the local area (30%)*



02: Content & Messaging

Content Ideas

- **Highlight the coast:** Content of coastal settings should be featured as much as possible on digital channels. Images of marine activities, such as water sports and diving, emphasize the variety of safe activity options available at coastal destinations.
- **Feature solo or partner activities:** Amplify Images of solo travelers or partners, particularly on social media channels. Examples include birdwatching and hiking.
- **Open air activities:** Travelers have a higher degree of comfort with outdoor activities. Feature activities that can be done in the open air.
- **Be uplifting:** We all need some positive content right now! Share messages & images that are uplifting, that will make others pause & smile.



02: Content & Messaging

Content Ideas: Highlight the Coast

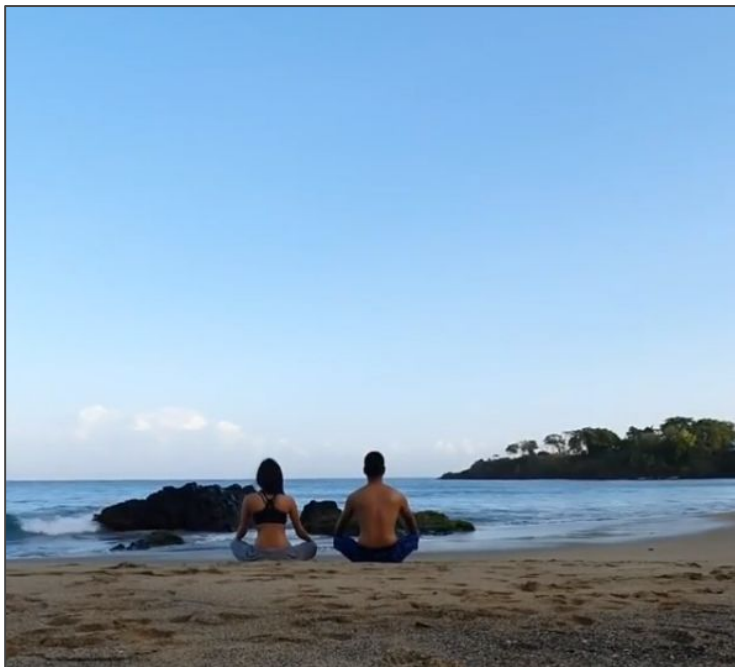
Examples: Take every opportunity to highlight the water, including marine activities. The examples below are from the social media feeds of Marigot Bay Resort in Saint Lucia.





02: Content & Messaging

Content Ideas: Solo & Partner Activities





02: Content & Messaging

Content Ideas: Outdoor Activities

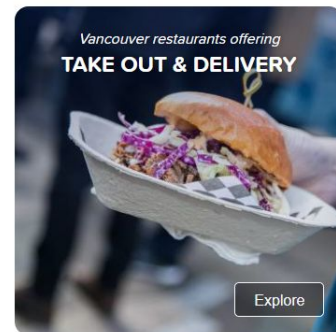
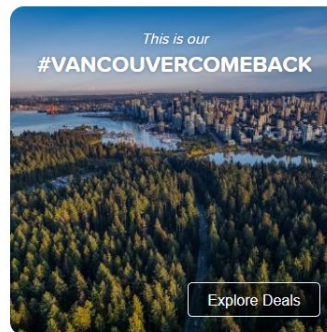
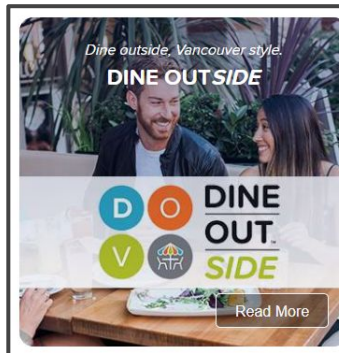
Ad · www.marigotbayresort.com/ ▾ (321) 821-0798

Marigot Bay Resort and Marina | So many ways to get outdoors

Let Marigot Bay Resort's exceptional team create magical moments for you. Including unique Private Dining experiences either in lush tropical settings or in-room. Botanical Gardens. Wellness Facility. Private Beach. Types: Penthouse Suites, Suites, Junior Suites. [Spa](#) · [Special Offers](#) · [Marina](#) · [Experiences](#) · [Dining](#) · [Special Occasions](#)

Update advertisements and business descriptions to emphasize outdoor activities.

Example: Encourage guests to explore outdoor dining options, when possible.





02: Content & Messaging

Content Ideas: Uplifting Content



Summary: Do's and Don'ts

Do's:

- Review content & messaging frequently to ensure that it is in alignment with guidance from tourism organizations.
- Provide links to up-to-date travel information.
- Keep in mind the three main themes: utility, wellbeing, and community.
- Tone is important; a calm, yet authoritative, tone builds consumer trust.
- Emphasize flexible cancellation policies

Don'ts:

- Remove images that feature medium to large group activities, and think twice about content that features indoor activities.
- Reconsider content featuring crowds and festivals.
- Steer away from content that is geared toward “high risk” travel groups, such as the elderly.

Additional Resources

For Hotels

- **Next Guest:** A hospitality marketing and technology agency that has created a [COVID-19 Resource Center](#) specifically dedicated to digital resources for hotel recovery.
- **HotelSpeak:** This [article](#) on pivoting digital strategy during COVID-19 includes a list of virtual content ideas for hotels, along with other tips & recommendations.

For Tour Operators

- **Tourwriter:** A tour technology company that produces free e-books for tour operators as they navigate recovery during COVID-19.
→ Free download: [*“Adapting your digital marketing strategy during COVID-19: A tour operator’s guide to effective marketing without spending a cent”*](#)



03

WEBSITE BEST PRACTICES



03: Website Best Practices

COVID-19 Website Updates

During COVID-19, tourism business websites **MUST** communicate the following:

- Your COVID-19 prevention plan
- Your cancellation policy
- Clear contact information, for travelers with questions or concerns
- Frequently asked questions about COVID-19
- BONUS: How the business is helping the community

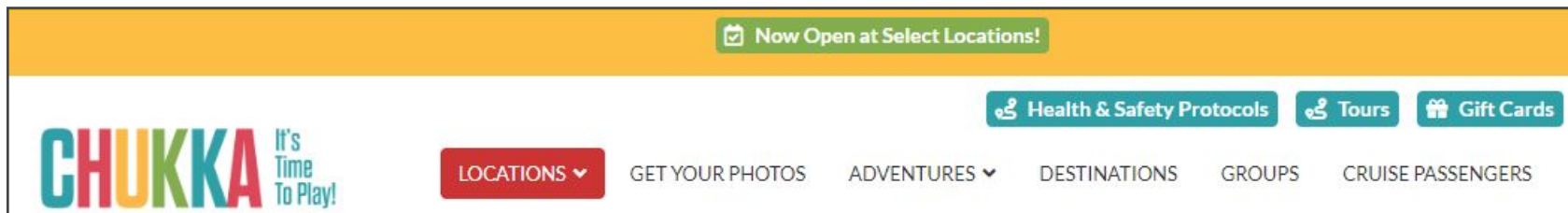


03: Website Best Practices

COVID-19 Website Updates

There are four key best practices to consider for your website:

1. It is important that tourism businesses provide potential travelers with correct and up-to-date information on:
 - How the destination and the business are dealing with the COVID-19 crisis
 - How the destination and the business are preparing to deliver safe experiences



- Consider creating a dedicated landing page on your website for COVID-19 FAQs, or adjust your homepage to include a few highlights - just the most critical information.



03: Website Best Practices

COVID-19 Website Updates

2. Make sure your website content is informative, reassuring, and inviting.
 - Conduct an audit of your website's content - both the writing and images.
 - Remove references (for now!) to large groups and festivals
 - Remove images of gatherings and groups of people
3. Reduce planning anxiety for potential visitors and promote activities that are lesser-known or better suited for social distancing.
 - Remove the guesswork by including sample itineraries on your website for inspiration and trip planning



03: Website Best Practices

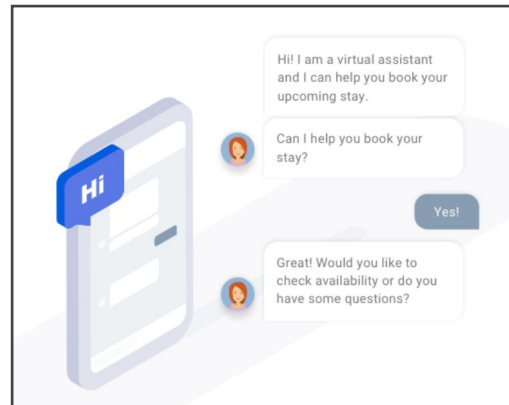
COVID-19 Website Updates

4. Due to temporary closures and limited hours, businesses have less opportunity to communicate with potential customers. To keep the lines of communication open, experts recommend adding a live chat bot widget to your website. (This is also a faster alternative to having guests email reservation inquiries for hotels.)

- Consider adding a chatbot to your website.

Potential vendors include:

- [Triptease](#) (for hotels)
- [Intercom](#)
- [HiJiffy](#)
- [Drift](#)



- Provide important follow-up resources, such as government rules and regulations regarding COVID

Summary: Do's and Don'ts

Do's:

- Share your COVID-19 prevention plan
- Be transparent about your cancellation policy
- Have clear contact information on homepage and a Frequently Asked Questions space about COVID-19
- Audit website for non-COVID compliant content

Don'ts:

- Keep images and copy that don't fit the "new-normal" (think crowded events)
- NOT post COVID-19 news and updates
- Hide cancellation policy information; keep information easily accessible



03: Website Best Practices

Additional Resources

TravelPulse: [6 Tips for Perfecting Your Travel Website](#)

Sojern: [Improve Your Hotel Website and Grow Direct Bookings Now](#)

Sojern: [Driving Bookings on Your Attraction's Website](#)



04

SOCIAL MEDIA



04: Social Media Best Practices

COVID-19 Social Media Engagement

During COVID-19, it is important for tourism businesses to continue engagement across a variety of social media platforms.

Important considerations:

- Focus first on free (organic) media
- Get strategic beyond creating new content
- Use paid media wisely depending on destination's border status
- Anticipate potential visitor demographic shifts
- **BONUS: Coordinate with national COVID-19 messaging**



Types of Social Media

Organic media: free content (images, videos) shared by users and businesses on social feeds

Paid media: Paid advertising on social platforms, either through "boosting" organic content or designing unique advertisements



04: Social Media Best Practices

Organic Social Media

Best practices for organic social media:

1. Free Media is essential for your digital marketing strategy:

- Continue to engage with followers during the crisis
- Keep information relevant, but light
- Revamp social efforts to provide followers with inspirational videos and imagery
- Increase postings, engagement and interactions across social platforms - show them your paradise!

2. Get strategic about how you post and where:

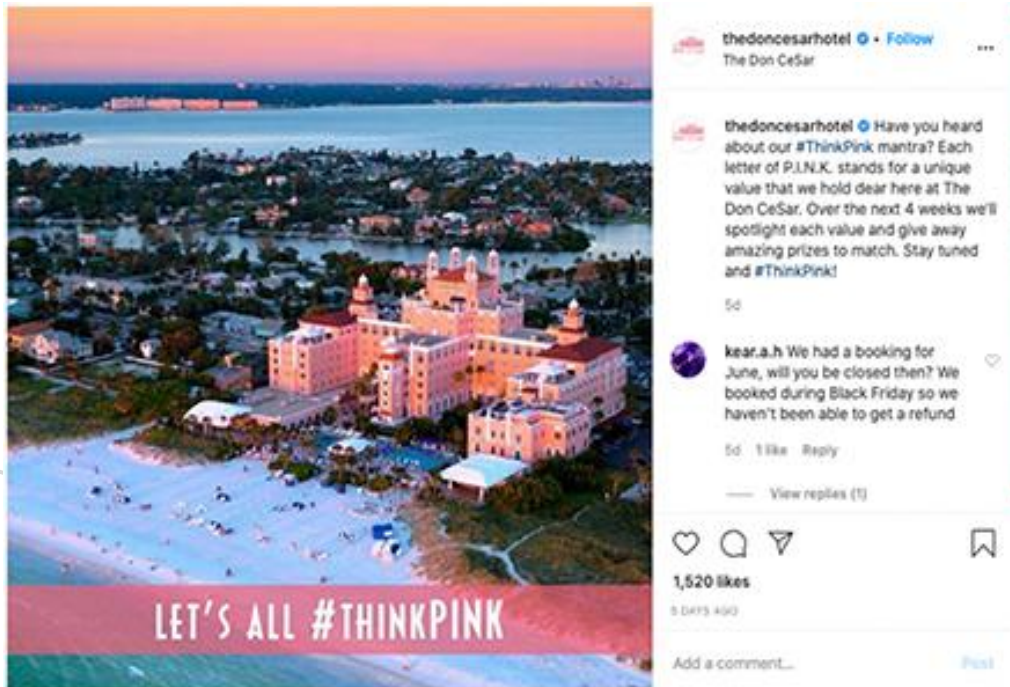
- On Facebook/Twitter, pin important posts to the top of your feed
- On Instagram, add your website in the bio section and make a designated “story highlight” about COVID-19 in your destination
 - One for serious health/safety news
 - One for fun light-hearted social distancing fun to attract and inspire



04: Content & Messaging

Organic Social Media

Example of positive and engaging accommodation social media posts:



Don CeSar Hotel on St. Pete Beach, FL



04: Content & Messaging

Paid Social Media

Best practices for paid social media:

Paid media considerations BEFORE international tourism returns to your destination:

- Target regional and/or local audiences only; don't waste your money trying to reach distant source markets until your destination has a plan for re-opening
- Shift your messaging to fit your new short-term demographics (domestic market)

Paid media consideration when international visitors are allowed BACK to your destination:

- Contact your local Tourism Board for information on future traveler demographics and important COVID-19 regulations for international visitors
- Confirm source market demographics before paying to boost your advertisements
- Narrow your target audience on those who have shown a demonstrated interest in travel to the Caribbean and/or consider targeting only those who have recently visited your website or social feeds to improve your return on ad spend (ROAS)

Summary: Do's and Don'ts

Do's:

- Focus more on Free Media
- Stay (or get more) engaged!
- Think about strategies beyond just new content
- Only use Paid Media for domestic markets first if borders are closed
- Anticipate potential visitor demographic shifts
- Coordinate with national COVID-19 messaging

Don'ts:

- Stay silent
- Assume your customer base will stay the same
- Continue paying for media to attract international market segments if borders are closed
- Pretend COVID-19 isn't happening



04: Social Media

Additional Resources

Sojern: [Secrets To Driving Travel Demand on Facebook](#)

Sprout Social: [How COVID-19 has changes social media engagement](#)

Revenue Hub: [Social Media During COVID-19: Tourism Brands That Got It Right](#)

*us show
world!*

Search by destination...

Check-in

05

**ONLINE BUSINESS
LISTINGS**

PORTO

ROME

ATHENS



05: Online Business Listings

Why are up-to-date listings important?

- Travelers are viewing online business listings with increased scrutiny, as they search for updates related to **COVID-19 health and safety protocols**.
- Keeping business listings up-to-date with the latest information about your business generates credibility, which leads to **higher conversion! (\$\$\$)**
- Updated business listings help improve your business's **search engine optimization** on Google, which accounts for over 70% of travel searches.



05: Online Business Listings

Online Travel Agencies

COVID-19 “To Do” List:

- ✔ Share your enhanced cleaning practices and safety measures
- ✔ Update policies to be **flexible** (remove advance purchase offers!)
- ✔ Consider adding “value adds” such as a room upgrade, early check-in, or complimentary meals
- ✔ Open your inventory through 2022, for travelers that are rebooking
- ✔ Refresh your listing content to account for service & amenity updates in light of COVID-19
- ✔ Leverage the rich data provided by online travel agencies to learn!



05: Online Business Listings

Online Travel Agencies

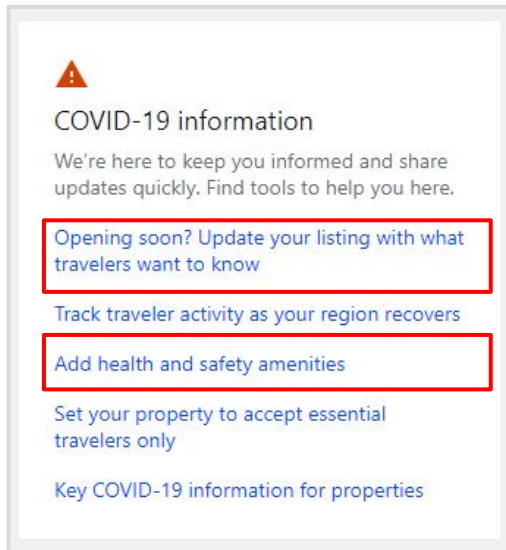


How To Update Expedia

1. Manage information about your property's temporary closure or reopening dates
2. Update "Health & Safety Amenities"
3. Remember to update your rates and availability; if possible, extend availability out through 2021
4. Leverage "Market Insights" to learn more about travel recovery in your region - *located in Expedia Partner Central under "Analytics"*



COVID-19 Updates located on the upper right corner of the Expedia Partner Central homepage:





05: Online Business Listings

Online Travel Agencies



Other Expedia Updates

- Keep an eye out for the recently launched “Revive and Relief” program. This program has two primary components:
 1. Financial relief, including reduced commissions and more time (90 days) to pay commission invoices
 2. Marketing support through Expedia Accelerator credits, to help boost your property’s visibility in search rankings

→ **HOTELS CAN OPT IN TO THIS PROGRAM, NO COSTS INVOLVED.**

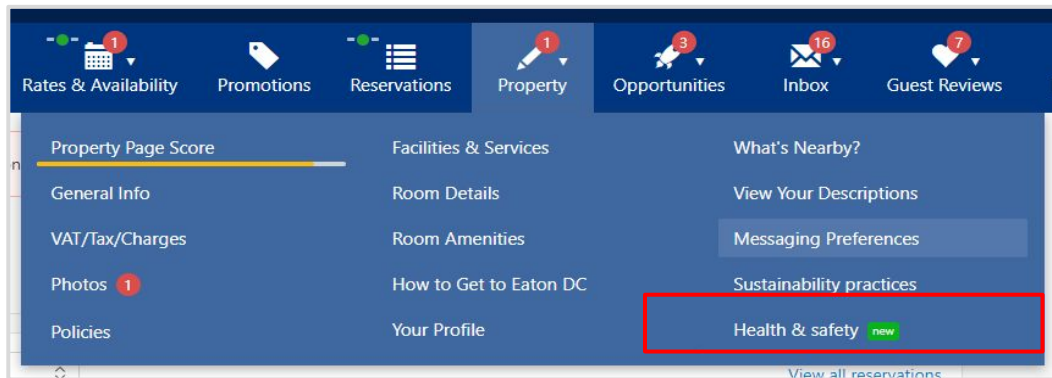


05: Online Business Listings

Online Travel Agencies

How To Update Booking.com

1. Manage information about your property's temporary closure or reopening dates
2. Update "Health & Safety Amenities"
3. Remember to update your rates and availability; if possible, extend availability out as far as possible (into 2022)





05: Online Business Listings

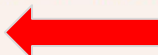
TripAdvisor

Link to COVID-19 Response Center is located in TA Management Center:

Help build traveler confidence: Share safety details

Share the safety measures you're taking to help potential guests feel more confident as they venture out.

Share Safety Details



How To Update TripAdvisor

1. Mark your property as temporarily closed (if applicable!)
2. Complete the Safety Measure checklist
3. Share a custom message about your business's response to COVID-19

COVID-19 Response Center

Share the safety measures you're taking in response to COVID-19

12 Safety measures are pending

Select the safety measures you're currently using today. These measures will appear on your listing page and will also make you eligible to appear in our COVID-19 safety search filter for your destination. Please be honest and thoughtful, so you properly set travelers' expectations when they visit your accommodation. For additional best practices, check out [this](#) article.

- | | |
|--|--|
| ☒ All linens sanitized in high-temperature wash ⓘ | ☒ Staff required to regularly wash hands ⓘ |
| ☒ Face masks required for guests in public areas ⓘ | ☒ Regular temperature checks for staff ⓘ |
| ☒ Face masks required for staff in public areas ⓘ | ☒ Contactless check-in ⓘ |
| ☐ Floors marked for social distancing | ☒ Contactless check-out ⓘ |
| ☒ Hand sanitizer available to guests & staff ⓘ | ☐ Doctors available 24/7 |
| ☒ Paid stay-at-home policy for staff with symptoms ⓘ | ☒ Individually wrapped toiletries ⓘ |
| ☒ Regularly sanitized high-traffic areas ⓘ | ☒ 24-hour minimum vacancy between guests ⓘ |



Travel safe during COVID-19

What you can expect during your stay

- All linens sanitized in high-temperature wash
- Face masks required for staff in public areas
- Floors marked for social distancing
- Hand sanitizer available to guests & staff
- Regularly sanitized high-traffic areas
- Staff required to regularly wash hands

Read more ▾

Updated 07/03/20 Safety precautions are provided by the property and are not checked by Tripadvisor for accuracy.

A note from Best Western Plus Belize Biltmore Plaza

Our fundamental goal for our hotel is to provide our guests and team members with a safe, secure, and clean environment. The times we are presently living requires

Read more ▾

More questions?

+501 223-2302

Email hotel

Community

Ask a question

Write a review

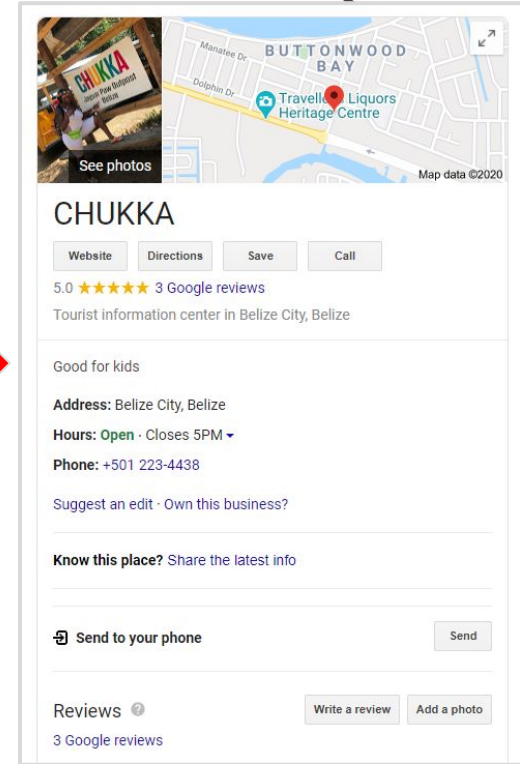


05: Online Business Listings

Google My Business

Why is my business' Google My Business listing important?

- The “knowledge panel” functions as your business card on Google
- Travelers are becoming more likely to use Google My Business, and less likely to visit your website
- **GMB listings with photos and virtual tours are 2x as likely to generate the interest of travelers**
- Missing or inaccurate information detracts from your business's credibility



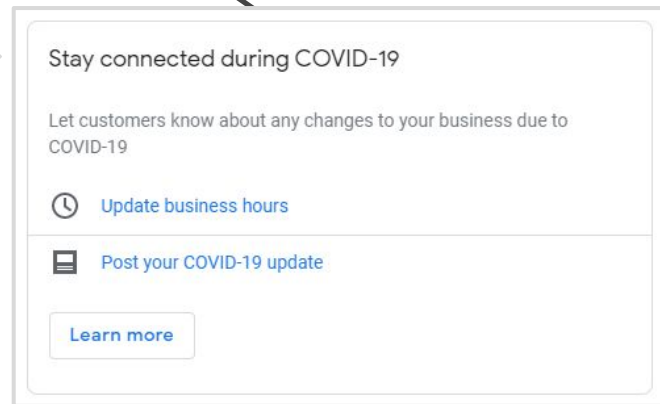


05: Online Business Listings

Google My Business

Updates for COVID-19

- Go to business.google.com and navigate to the section titled “Stay connected during COVID-19”
- Update your business opening or closure status, adjust your operating hours, and for non-hotels, post a custom COVID-19 update
- **DO NOT USE THE “TEMPORARY CLOSURE” FEATURE UNLESS YOUR BUSINESS IS CLOSED FOR 4 OR MORE WEEKS.**
- If you mark your business as temporarily closed, remember to revisit GMB and open it when ready



Non-hotels are able to create a “Post” on GMB through a user-friendly template. Consider using this area to promote your health & safety protocols. Posts last for 7 days, so they must be updated with frequency!



05: Online Business Listings

Google My Business

General Best Practices

- Avoid making many changes to your Google My Business listing at once; making major changes to your business profile may result in your profile being flagged. Due to all of the changes occurring, the approval process is backlogged and slow.
- Add as many pictures as you can, and videos if possible. Virtual tours are particularly impactful.
- **Reviews on Google My Business** are quickly rising in importance (as TripAdvisor fades). Remember to monitor Google reviews regularly and respond frequently.

The 501hub

13 Cork St, Belize City, Belize

4.6 ★★★★★ 88 reviews

Sort by: Most relevant

All drinks 8 experience 6 dinner 4 oxtail 3 +4



Ilari Makimattila
Local Guide · 8 reviews · 8 photos

★★★★★ a year ago

This place is just amazing! We stayed at a hotel upstairs and ended up eating here every day. They had their opening night at the same day we arrived and that was clearly noticeable from the lack of experience but they compensated it with ... [More](#)



 Like

Response from the owner · a year ago

We're so glad to hear from you Ilari! We felt awful about the mishap on the morning of your tour and are happy we were given the opportunity to make it right. Thank you!

We appreciate you and are honored to be one of your "favorite places anywhere". On behalf of Team 501hub, THANK YOU and please come back soon :)

06

DIGITAL
TECHNOLOGIES





06: Digital Technologies

Why is incorporating technology important?

- While the use of digital technologies during travel was already on the upswing pre-pandemic, new technologies will play an even larger role in the travel experience moving forward.
- Digital technologies have shifted from helpful to required; post COVID-19, travelers will expect enhanced digital experiences before and during their trips.
- In the “new normal”, digital technologies can help in two primary areas:
 - Increasing customer acquisition through cultivating a strong and credible digital presence
 - Improving the guest experience by reducing touch points



06: Digital Technologies

Informed Digital Technology Decisions

- Digital technologies often require a considerable investment of time and financial resources to implement. Informed decision-making is key to making the right long-term investments for your business.
- Experts agree that not ALL digital technologies have staying power. As recovery persists, it is expected that some technologies will fade in relevance.

Tech that may fade...

- Temperature checks
- Track and trace software
- In-room technologies/voice assistants
- Robots

Tech that may stay...

- Guest messaging platforms
- Staff communication tools
- Contactless payments
- Online food & drink ordering



06: Digital Technologies

Digital Technologies to Consider

Guest Messaging Platforms

These are messaging and chatbot platforms that will help your business easily communicate with guests before, during, and after their stay.



Staff Communication Tools

These are platforms and/or applications that facilitate seamless staff communication, allowing fast and accurate fulfillment of guest requests.



Contactless Payments

There are payment platforms that allow travelers to pay digitally for services, either in advance (prepayment) or at the time of service.



Online Food & Drink Ordering

Including solutions for both hotels and restaurants, these applications facilitate contactless food & beverage ordering.



THANK YOU!

This digital toolkit was developed by a team of student consultants from the George Washington University's School of Business.

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