



TOURISM FOR A BETTER WORLD

Epidemics and Pandemics in Visitor Guiding

Epidemic: An **epidemic** refers to a sudden, often unexpected, increase in the number of cases of a disease in a specific geographical area or population, clearly exceeding what is normally expected for that disease in that region. It signifies that the disease is spreading rapidly and affecting a larger proportion of the community than usual. While an epidemic is significant, its spread is generally localized or contained within a particular community, region, or country.

Pandemic: A **pandemic** is an epidemic that has spread over a very wide geographical area, typically across multiple countries or continents, or even worldwide. It signifies a global outbreak of a new disease (or a new strain of an existing one) to which most people have little or no immunity, leading to sustained human-to-human transmission across international boundaries and affecting a large number of people globally. The key distinction from an epidemic is its vast geographical spread.

Epidemics and Pandemics: Impact on Tourism

Epidemics and pandemics trigger health-related crises that can profoundly devastate the travel industry. Unlike localized natural disasters or political unrest, their effects are often widespread, spanning regions or even the entire globe.

For instance, the **Ebola epidemic between 2014 and 2016** significantly impacted several West African countries and had ripple effects on tourism across other parts of Africa. More recently, the **global COVID-19 pandemic** deeply affected economies worldwide, leading to an unprecedented **60-80% decline in international tourism in 2020**.

For the tourism industry, this translates to substantial job losses, revenue declines, a severe lack of business, and pervasive insecurity about the future.

Recovery of the Tourism Industry

The COVID-19 crisis paralyzed the global economy on an unprecedented scale, and its long-term implications remain uncertain. The pace of recovery for the tourism industry hinges on various factors:

- **Duration of the Pandemic:** How long will the pandemic last? When will effective treatments or vaccines become widely available?
- **Travel Restrictions and Lockdown Measures:** When and how will countries begin easing travel restrictions? What local or regional travel warnings and quarantine measures will be implemented?
- **Consumer Confidence:** How long will it take for consumers to feel secure enough to resume traveling? How will travel behavior evolve – will there be a shift towards domestic over international travel? How will social distancing guidelines impact future travel experiences?
- **Economic Impact:** How deep and prolonged will the global recession be? What will be the future disposable income for travel? What economic impact has the crisis had on service providers in destinations worldwide, including those in Your country?
- **Government Measures:** How are governments globally supporting tourism? This includes the easing or imposition of new restrictions, and the provision of financial aid packages or funding opportunities, particularly for small and medium-sized businesses vital to the tourism ecosystem.

Reflecting on COVID-19's Impact in Your country

Consider the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic specifically within Your country:

- **Identify the risks of COVID-19 in your destination.**
- Conduct your own research on the pandemic's impact and current situation in Your country using reliable sources such as your country government, the Ministry of Tourism, Wildlife and Antiquities, the Your country Tourism Board, and relevant tourism associations.

Visitor Guiding During Epidemics: Navigating COVID-19

The global tourism industry has developed new safety protocols to resume operations under **COVID-19 regulations**. To minimize infection risks, **visitor guides must apply safety guidelines in accordance with their tour organizer's policies**. This includes:

- Developing a specific **COVID-19 emergency plan** in addition to the standard risk assessment.
- Allocating **additional resources** like Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) and hand sanitizer.
- Creating an **action protocol** for when customers show COVID-19 symptoms.
- **Complying with guidelines** issued by health organizations, such as Your country's Ministry of Health.

The COVID-19 Emergency Plan: Four Key Areas

Your COVID-19 emergency plan should encompass four crucial areas:

1. Adapting Visitor Guiding Activities

- **Gain Information:** Seek out information and training on health and hygiene risk prevention relevant to your activities. Research the health and hygiene protocols of local service providers (accommodation, restaurants, coaches, museums, etc.) in advance.
- **Prepare:** Plan how visits will be conducted based on your risk assessment and the restrictions/regulations of attraction providers (e.g., museums, monuments). Design walking tours and stops in open, spacious areas to ensure safe distances. Plan one-way routes in smaller towns and avoid crowded areas or small venues with limited capacity.
- **Establish Limits:** Determine the maximum number of customers per group, adhering to your tour organizer's guidelines. Driver-guides must follow specific guidelines issued by health authorities regarding vehicle capacity and ventilation.
- **Choose Wisely:** Select restaurants where customers can dine outdoors or where safe physical distancing is strictly ensured indoors.

2. Tour Briefing and Information Dissemination

To ensure participants are fully aware of hygiene measures, you should:

- **Send health and safety documents** to customers before the tour begins (preferably in their native language and with clear visuals).
- **Communicate all restrictions** to participants and ensure strict compliance. If a participant refuses to abide by the rules, the travel contract may need to be cancelled.

3. On Tour Protocols

- **Prevention:**
 - Regularly remind customers of preventative measures and urge them to comply.
 - If a visitor guide experiences COVID-19 symptoms, they must **immediately refrain from service**.
 - Use the PA system and microphone, ensuring a disposable cover is used for the microphone.
 - Comply with enhanced cleaning requirements, including using disinfectant products, adhering to cleaning frequencies, and disinfecting all used equipment and the vehicle if you are a driver-guide.
- **Protection:**

- Wear a mask or protective shield when safe physical distance cannot be guaranteed or for guests with hearing impairments.
- Immediately dispose of used protective materials (gloves, masks) and personal hygiene waste (tissues) in authorized waste bins.
- Wash hands frequently with soap and water; if not possible, use hand sanitizer.
- **Avoidance:**
 - Avoid physical contact with customers at all times and maintain safe physical distance between customers and colleagues.
 - Avoid sharing equipment with customers and other guides. If equipment must be shared, establish clear cleaning and disinfection guidelines.
 - Avoid using printed materials like brochures, pictures, or objects.
 - Prioritize card payments over cash for any services.
 - Avoid improvising the planned schedule, as deviations can introduce unforeseen risks.

4. Cooperation with Service Providers

Effective coordination with local service providers is crucial:

- Send a list of customer details in advance.
- Set up appointments and time slots for visits.
- Implement staggered entrances to hotels, museums, and monuments.
- Hand out room keys inside the coach to minimize contact at reception.
- Adhere to transport guidelines for coaches, such as maintaining space between passengers and the driver, and ensuring each passenger occupies the same seat for the duration of the tour.
- If possible, split larger groups for entrances to reduce crowding.

Your Next Steps for Preparedness

This covers visitor guiding during epidemics like COVID-19. To ensure you're well-prepared, here are three tasks:

- **Research COVID-19 test facilities and procedures** (including costs and result times) in your area of operation in Your country.
- **Contact your local health authority** (e.g., the Ministry of Health or district health office) and inquire about specific procedures in case a COVID-19 case is identified within your tour group.

- **Prepare an introductory speech** outlining the new safety rules and measures for your guests. Practice delivering this speech to a friend or colleague.

You've successfully completed this unit on crisis management in visitor guiding. I look forward to our next session!