

All Aboard: Cruise Ship Industry Resilience Against COVID-19 Pandemic

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Abstract- Cruise ships are considered to be the fastest growing sector of the Tourism Industry with Billions being generated to help the economy's growth and create impact to the world, given its diverse multicultural employment.

The Cruise Ship Industry had been Resilient throughout the pandemic, from taking care of their crew repatriation, to maximizing time spent in dock for improvement and maintenance and to ensuring passenger health protocol. This Industry is considered to be well planned and organized with events planned three years in advance. Given the current fluctuating Covid19 test result, the industry has made it possible to return and offer their services again.

With Various Health Protocols being observed in different Nations and Government, the said Industry had been able to create an opportunity to facilitate guidelines that will allow them to maneuver back to the seas. Amended procedure was created to give emphasis on the crews and passenger welfare. Diversification leads the marketing strategy in offering travel plans to the new and loyal passenger. The purpose of the study is to understand the impact of Covid19 to the Cruising Industry and how it navigates through the pandemic. Also, to identify the possible courses of action taken to withstand the aggravating weather resulting in its renewed embarkation.

I. INTRODUCTION

The Covid 19 Pandemic had immensely targeted the Cruise ship Industry, placing the vast majority of the fleets on dock and thousands of employees repatriated to their designated countries. Multi Billion Dollars possible profit went down the drain. Investors and Stockholders were challenged to keep business afloat. Considering all the thousands of employee's safety

and financial obligations. The Pandemic came trembling without any prior notice nor a sound of horn to give warning. Multiple preparations were made for Risk reduction, Health protocols, Preventive Maintenance and Environmental Awareness but none was ready for what had come. A sudden Ship stop, prohibiting all kinds of passengers to go on board and placing all existing travelers on quarantine protocol. Many ships had sailed to different destinations with less than its minimum capacity just to assist for deportation.

For more than a year, severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2), the virus that causes coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19), has quickly spread across the world, leading to major personal and professional disruption. The spread of SARS-CoV-2 to several continents and dozens of countries prompted the World Health Organization (WHO) to declare a global pandemic (WHO, 2020a). Based on current scientific understanding, the virus is believed to be transmitted from person-to-person primarily via respiratory droplets and secretions, as well as through contact with contaminated surfaces (Abebe et al., 2020; WHO, 2020b). Recent evidence has suggested that airborne transmission may also play a role in spread; however, the extent of that role is currently unknown and requires further investigation (WHO, 2020b). In addition, presymptomatic and asymptomatic individuals can shed the virus, further complicating transmission control (Abebe et al., 2020). Limited testing and difficulty in monitoring mild, presymptomatic, and asymptomatic cases have created distinct challenges for case management, contact tracing, and adequate care for COVID-19 patients. The novelty of the virus, combined with the variation in pandemic response across countries, has illuminated gaps in infection control preparedness across governments and industries worldwide.

Cruise ships, in particular, have been heavily affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, resulting in an industry-wide halt in their US operations. Historically, cruise ships have managed and controlled occasional gastrointestinal (GI) and respiratory disease outbreaks, including common pathogens, such as norovirus, hepatitis E, influenza A and B, *Escherichia coli*, *Salmonella enterica*, *Shigella*, *Legionella*, and other viral, bacterial, and parasitic pathogens (Bert et al., 2014; Kak, 2015). The cruise ship environment, including passengers in close and confined quarters, cohabitation of common areas, consistent contact between passengers, and contact between passengers from different geographical regions, can facilitate infectious disease spread (Kak, 2015; Moriarty et al., 2020). These factors, along with the infectious nature of SARS-CoV-2, create susceptible conditions for rapid transmission and infection. Further, cruise ships typically have a large population of passengers over the age of 65, who are more vulnerable to infection, which may result in a higher proportion of severe cases among infected individuals onboard (Mallapaty, 2020; Moriarty et al., 2020).

II. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The cruise industry is a strong example of a well-planned and successful industry. Before this worldwide pandemic crisis, all ship information was available three years in advance; this included its future location, itineraries, rates, and even on-board menus were planned in advance. The success of this industry is shown in their average annual growth rate of 5.4% between 2009 and 2019 (Clia, 2020), which is higher than regular land-based tourism (4.9%) over the time period 1980 – 2017 (Perucic, 2019). Because of its popularity and success, the number of new ships launched every year and also the size of these ships is increasing (Clia, 2020). Another strategy for regular cruise lines is the decrease of cruise fares, which is possibly due to the expectation of having more expenditures on board by selling services and products at an extra price. As a consequence of new and larger ships that are the destination themselves, decreasing fares, great itineraries, and other factors, the number of tourists has been rising as well. Not only does the cruise line benefit from this incredible increase, but also the ports of call, the salesforce, workforce, and the supply chain as a whole. The cruise industry is part of

a global chain, which demands capital-intensive and long-term planning.

Until recently, cruises were the fastest growing sector of the travel industry. In the past five years, the demand has increased by 20.5 percent. Statistics show that in 2017 around 26.7 million people chose to go on a cruise, followed by 28.5 million in 2018 and an estimated 32 million in 2020. In 2018, it was estimated that the world cruise industry is worth approximately \$150 billion. In the global cruise market, there are over 50 cruise lines and more than 270 ships, however, just around 75 percent of the market is controlled by three main players. These leading companies oversee an empire of subsidiary cruise lines, collectively bringing in \$34.2 billion in revenue in 2018. The value per share relating to the industry's largest three entities at the beginning of this year was \$134.55, \$58.79 and \$51.35.

The recent and on-going global outbreak of the Coronavirus has created a high degree of disquiet amongst the public as to the maintenance of health and safety on board cruise ships. Fears within the industry are that the impact of COVID-19 will affect sales for a long-time, particularly in the Asian market, which has become a very important market for cruise companies in recent years.

III. CAUSE OF THE PROBLEM

- Vaccine Availability

The creation of vaccines can be considered fast in comparison to other pandemic or to dissimilar diseases that still do not have a vaccine. Clinical trials and testing must also be considered, also some bureaucracy and inter country data sharing guidelines. The scarcity and difference in preference of vaccine force the needy to take any available supply. But at the end of the day, the availability of the Vaccine hampered the resumption of operation. In some cases, even the validity of vaccine consumption creates a gap in prescribing procedures.

- Fluctuating Protocols

Being categorized as a Global Pandemic, the Health Protocol becomes complicated to observe. Having multiple sets of guidelines created as per each

Country's perception. It hinders travelers from crossing borders.

- Virus Evolution

The mutation of the Covid19 into various strains in different countries makes the pandemic much harder to constrain. Development and new studies are required to facilitate the transformation of strains.

- Financial Hindrance

With the limitation in work movement and availability the interest to travel declines which leads to lesser leisure planning and enablement. Prior itinerary had to be placed in halt and deviations are considered such as refund.

- Corona Phobia

An excessive triggered response of fear of contracting the virus causing COVID-19, leading to accompanied excessive concern over physiological symptoms, significant stress about personal and occupational loss, increased reassurance and safety seeking behaviors, and avoidance of public places and situations, causing marked impairment in daily life functioning. The triggers involve situations or people involving probability of virus contraction, such as, meeting people, leaving house, travelling, reading the updates or news, falling ill or going for work outside.

IV. COURSES OF ACTION

- Embarkation Testing

To heighten precautionary measures, all passengers and crew will undergo screening procedure and testing prior to any departure of the cruise ship from any port. In this manner if not eliminating but making a quantifiable lesser probability of spreading the virus.

- Vaccination

A complete dose of Vaccination should be a requirement to both travelling passenger and crew as a primary travel requirement. To inhibit from probable severe infection.

- Unified Protocol

Creation of inter country policy that will serve as a common guideline to all travelling cruise ship from one port to another. To eliminate misperception and

conflict there must be an agreed protocol to be unilaterally observed and practiced. Denial of boarding or embarkation for violation.

- Enhance Medical and Health Preparedness

Improve inter agency communication in relevance to the current pandemic, to augment response quality. Creation of designated Facility with standby equipment and supplies specifically for Covid19 threat. Pre-arrange Logistical response for any emergency needed. Expanded observe guidelines and strict practice in the duration of cruise. Continuous evaluation and planning in detecting and preventing covid19 spread.

- Innovation with Research and Development

Given that all ships were forced to dock, this is an opportunity to conduct testing and evaluation for any companies plan to reduce carbon & sulfur emission, renewable energy, advanced water system treatment and technology advancement in response to the Global demand of better Environment Action Program.

- Shipboard Maintenance

A great opportunity for the company's Engineers to conduct evaluation and preventive maintenance of all cruise ships. Inside the cruise ship when sailing none of the sea battling is seen or more often felt. But within the Engineering room and Captains Bridge all the variation of weather and its force can be seen and felt. With this, necessary upkeep and deterrence can be assessed. As most believe; Prevention is better than cure.

- Leverage customer loyalty

Keeping your company afloat in the post-pandemic world would require you to prioritize customer loyalty rather than sales and profits. You may have to accept cancellations, which is best done gracefully. Offering bonus credits instead of cash refunds is a good idea as it will get them back sooner or later. But don't force them to accept credits, if they have no plans to travel again in the near future. Provide incentives and discounts for future bookings and be available with solid customer support if they need to ask questions. Customer loyalty is all about winning the confidence of people. Although cruising through the crisis sounds like a massive challenge, it isn't something you cannot

achieve. Building on customer trust is the best way to get through and survive through the situation and embark on a new journey of hope.

CONCLUSION

The Covid19 Pandemic had severely injured the great industry of tourism from low to high, all was affected. No one was spared from the trebling strength and regardless how high and mighty the cruise ship industry is, it was forced to set sail home, anchored and docked.

However, tourism remains resilient and embodies resurrection. Without a doubt travel and leisure remain to be one of the top demands of the human race. As the pandemic continues to create havoc, humanity perseveres to fight for its existence through striving to return to normal.

The tourism sector locally and internationally starts to regain ground, it only proves that even in times of pandemic many still desire reaction and relaxation. And the government can use all the help it can get to survive and rebuild the economy.

RECOMMENDATION

Above all matters, Safety and Health is the primary concern of all travelers. Multiple factors are to be considered in keeping anyone from harm's way. But to strongly continue the fight against the Covid19 pandemic, there must be a Unified Protocol to be observe. To avoid confusion and create a sturdy rebirth for the cruise ship industry. In addition to mass vaccination programs in accordance with aiming community immunity.

Currently with the variation in manufacture of Covid19 vaccine, there are also differences in efficacy and clinical results thus creating preference in numerous institutions or countries. There should be a unilateral procedure that will supersede all authority thus creating a harmonious flow of operation.

Shipping management must also strive to regain passenger trust through extensive marketing folios, giving extensive highlights to safety in travelling. They must also generate incentive and discount

programs for returning passengers and future travel bookings. Simply enticing the market to avail cruising tickets and creating travel plans in the future.

Cruise ship companies must also willingly submit and faithfully exercise all Government guiding principles. Lastly to place both crew and passenger interest above anything in all the times.

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