



# SUSTAINABILITY + HEALTH

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# SUSTAINABILITY + HEALTH

Adopting a culture of health  
to advance sustainable travel & tourism

## OVERVIEW

**THE CULTURE OF HEALTH FRAMEWORK** can be used to accelerate sustainability, with Quelch's argument<sup>1</sup> being that "Every company, knowingly or unknowingly, impacts public health...".

It connects health and business directly across four domains:



**Consumers:** through the products and services a business delivers to consumers.



**Employees,** including supply chain: how a business treats its employees and supply chain workers.



**Community:** how much a business invests in the health of the communities in which it operates.



**Environment:** the impacts of a business on the environment.

The dual health and economic crises associated with the COVID-19 pandemic have thrown the disruptive forces acting on the Travel & Tourism sector into sharp relief, drawing attention to the interconnected and hyper-dependent nature of sustainability, health, and business. Lockdowns and border closures brought the sector to a halt, with re-opening strategies affected over the short- and medium-term. This presents an opportunity for Travel & Tourism businesses and stakeholders. Looking ahead, a range of approaches to advance sustainable Travel & Tourism framed around health, could help the sector **'build back better'**, advancing the contribution it makes to global citizenship and support a more balanced economy and equitable society.

Adopting the Culture of Health<sup>2</sup> framework could fast track the Travel & Tourism sector's move to enhance its sustainability, supported by conscious consumerism and governmental oversight.

By positioning the health of people and the health of the natural world as core strategic agendas, sustainable business practices in Travel & Tourism can be advanced. Indeed, **embracing a culture of health offers a way for the sector to both foster sustainability and position itself for a world after the COVID-19 pandemic subsides.** In this way, the sector can pivot more powerfully from the pandemic, as a force for good in helping recover global economies and livelihoods.





# INTRODUCTION

**T**RAVEL & TOURISM is a “social, cultural and economic phenomenon which entails the movement of people to countries or places outside their usual environment for personal or business /professional purposes”<sup>3</sup>. In 2019, before the COVID-19 pandemic, Travel & Tourism was one of the world’s largest and fastest growing economic sectors, with the last decade marking the first time that more than one billion people crossed an international border as a visitor in a single year<sup>4</sup>. The growth of the Travel & Tourism sector is seen as a “key driver for socio-economic progress”<sup>5</sup>, because of its significant contribution to the development of local economies and sizeable contribution to gross domestic product (GDP) in many countries.

The World Travel & Tourism Council (WTTTC), which represents the global Travel & Tourism private sector, highlights the sector’s contribution to global GDP at 10.4% in 2019<sup>6</sup>, amounting to over US\$8.9 trillion. Travel & Tourism supported one in 10 jobs (334 million) worldwide and one in four new jobs over the last five years, with 3.5% growth in 2019 compared to the global economy at 2.5%<sup>7</sup>. The sector represented nearly 30% of total service exports and is core to the economy of many nations. In 2019, domestic tourism represented 71.3% of total tourism spend, business travel 21.4% and leisure travel 78.6%, with a high proportion of women in employment and a dependency on natural and cultural resources<sup>8</sup>. With 1.5 billion international tourist arrivals in 2019, and an additional one billion people forecast to join the global middle class by 2030, international travel was predicted to grow by some 35%<sup>9</sup> with 1.8 billion international arrivals by 2030 and domestic tourism up to four times this figure.<sup>10,11</sup>

The Travel & Tourism sector had seen six decades of consistent growth<sup>12</sup>, outpacing the United Nations growth projections over the period 2010-2019 and 45% of international travel arrivals to emerging economies<sup>13</sup> in 2017<sup>14</sup>. Still, international tourism statistics capture only a small part of the picture. In large nations such as China and the United States of America (U.S.), domestic tourism dominates travel destinations, with international arrivals only accounting for 3.3% of person-trips<sup>15</sup> in the U.S. for instance. With budget airlines lowering the costs of travel, disruptive technology creating platforms for accommodation, and travel searches making it easier to plan a trip, the Travel & Tourism growth curve looked set to continue unabated before the pandemic.

Looking ahead, the impact of the pandemic and speed of the recovery for the Travel & Tourism sector will vary based on governmental, company and individual responses to both the health and economic crises. Perceptions of risk and behavioural changes due to business and leisure practices adopted in the lockdown will further influence a return to a semblance of normalcy. A recent report by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) on COVID-19 recovery<sup>16</sup> **warned against policies and programmes that return the world to ‘business as usual’; rather it recommends that the recovery, whatever shape, or duration, be leveraged as a mechanism to ‘build back better’.**

# A CULTURE OF HEALTH: THE FRAMEWORK



**IF EVER THERE WAS A CRISIS that taught the world about health and the fragility of our economic model, it is CO-VID-19.** The impact of the pandemic demands we consider new ways to sustain business and health. In this context, **adopting the ‘Culture of Health’ framework<sup>17</sup>, which places well-being as a strategic business priority, could help accelerate the recovery of sustainable Travel & Tourism.** Quelch’s argument that “Every company, knowingly or unknowingly, impacts public health”<sup>18</sup> is an **agenda for sustainability and connects health and business across four domains:**



**Consumers:** through products and services a business delivers to consumers

The pandemic is unlikely to affect the enduring desire for Travel & Tourism to connect people and places. As tourists make decisions about where to travel, when, why and how; their considerations will likely focus more on health alongside other considerations such as affordability. This will include health across all its domains; from understanding safeguards should they fall ill while travelling, to assurances that the staff and destination take health seriously. Travellers will embrace more conscious consumerism, with a focus on responsible Travel & Tourism businesses. New opportunities are anticipated in health and wellness, as tourists prioritise trips that offer peace and tranquillity and seek immersive experiences in nature, as well as a focus on domestic travel.



**Employees:** how a business treats its employees and supply chain workers

When it comes to employees and organisational supply chains, the pandemic has brought to the forefront the importance of health benefits and protection for workers in Travel & Tourism, including more attention on mental health and overall well-being. It has also revealed inequities related to the social determinants of health. Lockdowns and trading restrictions have had a disproportional effect on small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) that support tourism<sup>19</sup>. Investment in supply chain resilience could help reduce environmental impacts, with increased attention to local sourcing.



**Community:** how a business invests in the health of the communities in which it operates

Within the community pillar, the Travel & Tourism sector can further engage and prioritise the needs of local residents and the preservation of local history, culture, and traditions, together with enhanced visitor flow management. With COVID-19 measures in place, governments and Travel & Tourism operators have looked to develop and spur demand among domestic and regional travellers in the short-term. This temporary re-focus on localism has incentivised citizens to explore their own countries and their different communities. Moreover, as some tourists may have an increased ability to work remotely in the future, there could be a rise in ‘slow’ tourism<sup>20</sup>. This is where the average trip length increases, with travellers looking to spend more time getting to know the community of their destination and seeking out more local experiences<sup>21</sup>.



**Environment:** *the impacts of a business on the environment*

Within the environment pillar, products and services offered by Travel & Tourism providers, as well as their pricing, should reflect their total impact. The deleterious impact of the sector, including its input to carbon emissions, freshwater use, and waste, needs to be balanced alongside its positive and restorative contributions to conservation efforts and equity, with further consideration of its impact on cultural and heritage artefacts and ways of living<sup>22</sup>. There is a significant opportunity for enhanced multinational and global coordination, with frameworks and policies aimed at creating a more holistic sustainability approach for the sector. Research that develops a ‘true’ cost for Travel & Tourism, using, for instance, the impact weighted accounting principles<sup>23</sup> or total impact measurements<sup>24</sup>, would be tremendously valuable for the sector, as it would extend Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) reporting; with health of the natural world being a key metric.

**By focusing on sustainability as health across all four pillars of the Culture of Health framework (see Figure 1 below), Travel & Tourism can make a full contribution to increasing business resiliency in addition to helping global economies and livelihoods recover<sup>25</sup>.**



**Figure 1:** The Culture of Health Framework to advance sustainable travel & tourism with examples of trends within each domain

 <b>Consumers</b>	 <b>Employees &amp; Supply Chain Workers</b>	 <b>Communities</b>	 <b>Environment</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▲ Behavioural change</li> <li>▼ Business travel</li> <li>▲ Conscious consumerism</li> <li>▲ Domestic travel</li> <li>▲ Driving</li> <li>▲ Health surveillance</li> <li>▲ Interest well-being</li> <li>▲ Nature</li> <li>▲ Pricing in ‘green’</li> <li>▲ Spend with ‘responsible’ companies</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▲ Demand health benefits</li> <li>▲ Education &amp; training</li> <li>▲ Equity</li> <li>▲ Focus health &amp; safety</li> <li>▲ Green jobs linked to stimulus recovery</li> <li>▲ Health surveillance</li> <li>▲ Localism</li> <li>▲ Social justice &amp; diversity</li> <li>▲ Supply chain simplification</li> <li>▲ Wages for frontline workers</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▲ Destination management</li> <li>▲ Domestic travellers</li> <li>▲ Focus on encounters</li> <li>▲ Immersive experiences</li> <li>▼ International tourists</li> <li>▲ Localism</li> <li>▲ Restrictions on number of tourists</li> <li>▲ ‘Slow’ tourism</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▼ Carbon</li> <li>▼ Chemical burden</li> <li>▲ Circular economy</li> <li>▲ Clean energy</li> <li>▲ Eco-materials</li> <li>▼ Greenhouse gas emissions</li> <li>▲ Recycling</li> <li>▼ Waste</li> </ul>

# CONCLUSION + ACTION PLAN



**T**HE GLOBAL HEALTH CRISIS associated with the COVID-19 pandemic illustrates the interconnection of human health, healthy businesses and the health of our planet. Safeguarding communities and ecosystems and creating a healthier future and economy for all parts of society to thrive is a shared purpose within the Travel & Tourism sector and its global stakeholder community.

In light of the devastating impact of COVID-19 on Travel & Tourism<sup>26</sup>, there is a unique opportunity to advance sustainability in Travel & Tourism with deliberate re-opening strategies that seek to advance the many positive contributions of the sector and attenuate any deleterious impacts. The desire to travel is not going away and we are already seeing demand beginning to recover<sup>27</sup>; however, the sector will evolve in the coming decades as health of customers, employees and workers in the supply chain, those in the community and the environment come to the fore. Trade-offs within Travel & Tourism will consider explicitly its impact on people, planet, and prosperity, seeking to secure economic interests and preserve the quality of life in destinations. Applying health as a strategic lens for business is a way to connect these agendas. With nature and culture being Travel & Tourism's most valuable assets, careful stewardship involves all stakeholders working in concert with appropriate governmental oversight and conscious personal choices and behaviours.

Embracing a **'Culture of Health'**<sup>28</sup> could help the Travel & Tourism sector make important strides in sustainability and position itself as the world re-opens after the COVID-19 pandemic. By protecting people and the planet over the long-term, the Travel & Tourism sector can create and sustain shared value, making its fullest contribution to fulfilling the Sustainable Development Goals and a world where "no-one will be left behind"<sup>29</sup>.

**This is the time for the Travel & Tourism sector to forge a new social contract, with sustainability framed as a Culture of Health and a driver of radical transformation.**

## As Travel & Tourism businesses join forces to accelerate the sector's sustainable recovery, actions they might consider:

1. Including health as a specific domain within their ESG reporting and Sustainability Strategy, selecting appropriate metrics
2. Translating environmental benefits secured by climate action, such as switching to renewable energy sources, transitioning to electric vehicles among others, into public health benefits using available impact models
3. Re-framing corporate social responsibility projects as a strategic corporate social innovation agenda, capturing investments in community endeavours
4. Connecting investments in workforce development, education and training to advancing a culture of well-being
5. Promoting healthy behaviours among all stakeholder groups
6. Ensuring equity is understood as a key outcome of a healthy business culture and operations

# ENDNOTES

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## DESIGN

World Travel & Tourism Council

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### **The World Travel & Tourism Council is the global authority on the economic and social contribution of Travel & Tourism.**

WTTTC promotes sustainable growth for the Travel & Tourism sector, working with governments and international institutions to create jobs, to drive exports and to generate prosperity. Council Members are the Chairs, Presidents and Chief Executives of the world's leading private sector Travel & Tourism businesses.

Together with Oxford Economics, WTTTC produces annual research that shows Travel & Tourism to be one of the world's largest sectors, supporting 334 million jobs and generating 10.4% of global GDP in 2019. Comprehensive reports quantify, compare and forecast the economic impact of Travel & Tourism on 185 economies around the world. In addition to individual country fact sheets, and fuller country reports, WTTTC produces a world report highlighting global trends and 25 further reports that focus on regions, sub-regions and economic and geographic groups.

To download reports or data, please visit: [wttc.org](http://wttc.org)



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