
Reflections on the theme issue outcomes: What are the prospects for the post-pandemic Caribbean cruise industry?

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Theme Editors Ibrahim Ajagunna, Matthew Ilori and Eron Mclean share their reflections on the significance and outcomes of the theme issue with Managing Editor Richard Teare.

Overview

Cruises are an important component of the international travel and tourism industry and operate across the globe, from the Mediterranean to the Pacific. The United States, with its long coastlines and access to many nearby ports in the Caribbean, is the world's leader in cruise revenue. Yet, travel restrictions arising from the coronavirus pandemic beginning in 2020 had significant financial consequences. Given this situation, this theme issue posed the question: *What are the prospects for the post-pandemic Caribbean cruise industry?* A list of the articles in this issue can be found in [Appendix](#).

Why in your view, is your theme issue strategic question important?

Cruise tourism has been the fastest growing sector of the tourism industry, and in the last ten years, the rate of growth has been phenomenal both in ship capacity and demand for cruising. Various estimates suggest that in 2017, around 26.7 m people chose to go on a cruise, rising to 28.5 m in 2018 and an estimated 32 m in early 2020. An array of current cruise industry data (including estimates of the impact of the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic) is available at: <https://www.statista.com/topics/1004/cruise-industry/#dossierKeyfigures>.

In early 2020, all cruise destination countries had to close their sea ports because of the COVID-19 pandemic. This left many cruise passengers and crew stranded at sea (in some case for almost a month) as cruise vessels sought ports at which to dock and disembark passengers. Currently and most probably in the future, cruise operators and land-based attractions must address the significant financial impact of the pandemic. As the disease may stay with us for long time, cruise operators are likely to encounter difficulties in attracting customers and this could lead to mergers and possibly the closure of some cruise operations. On the other hand, the pandemic has opened up many opportunities that the cruise industry must act upon. These include an opportunity to review their operations and determine the right approach for the future. Cruise operators have also had an opportunity to establish systems and standards to enable them to pivot more quickly in the event of future challenges with global implications. Further, the pandemic has presented an opportunity for closer collaboration with countries in the Caribbean who have been badly affected too and will want to leverage their collective negotiating power to help improve living standards while satisfying the needs of cruise operators and their customers. As this industry is so strategic to the economy of most Caribbean countries, it is therefore an opportune time to ask the question: *What are the prospects for the post-pandemic Caribbean cruise industry?*



Worldwide Hospitality and
Tourism Themes
Vol. 14 No. 2, 2022
pp. 199-203
© Emerald Publishing Limited
1755-4217
DOI 10.1108/WHATT-04-2022-163

Thinking about your theme issue plan and approach, what worked well?

As there was a sizeable writing team contributing to the collection of articles in this theme issue, we observed synergistic benefits from idea sharing and collaborative writing. Further, the reviewing process encouraged our authors to refine their work and they willingly accepted reviewer feedback. In fact, the interchange between authors and reviewers helped to ensure alignment with the theme issue question and this is satisfying to observe.

How did you engage with different stakeholder groups?

Almost all of our authors have an affiliation with either tourism or maritime operators and so together, we had access to an extensive network of stakeholders in these areas. Most of the data we collected in order to incorporate industry insight were gathered from telephone conversations with industry partners and via online surveys. In fact, the responses from stakeholders was phenomenal given that they are all feeling the impact of COVID-19 and are awaiting strategic direction and recommendations that will enable the industry to recover in the shortest possible time.

What were the highlights from stakeholder group interactions?

Many small island nations in the Caribbean and the world in general rely heavily on tourism and cruise tourism for employment and income and, in the Caribbean region, tourism-related activity accounts for about 6% of the entire gross domestic product (GDP) of some islands. Further, cruise passengers are willing to spend on land-based attractions, crafts and arts, sightseeing and duty-free shopping when they visit and, cruise operations further support an array of island-based food suppliers (among others) and the pandemic has affected all of these areas too. As everyone in the supply chain has been affected, we found that stakeholders at all levels were willing to share their insights with us, together with those involved in training and education.

Thinking about your peer review process: What went well and why?

Most of the reviewers have previously worked with the theme editors either in a reviewing capacity or as contributing authors. This meant that they understood the positioning of *Worldwide Hospitality and Tourism Themes (WHATT)* and its approach, and all of them were motivated to assist us in finding implementable solutions to the theme issue question. We were encouraged by the fact that they did this with enthusiasm and willingly contributed whatever time was needed to complete their role.

What are the most significant outcomes of your theme issue in terms of the contributions to knowledge and/or professional practice?

As cruise companies and cruise destinations continue to address the challenges posed by COVID-19 and its attendant variants, this is likely to require a sustained effort. Although cruise tourism has resumed, it is the case that cruise lines and island destinations need to develop new approaches to health and safety and to economic recovery. The island nations of the Caribbean have been socially and economically impacted, especially as some of them had previously made major investments in updating their cruise ports and attractions. Cruise operators have also made investments to support port development and their operations have been greatly curtailed. Recovery therefore should be high on the agenda of each island government and collectively by all Caribbean island governments, working in tandem with cruise operators.

What are the implications for management action and applied research arising from your theme issue outcomes?

In order to regain customer support as and when travel restrictions are lifted, cruise operators, cruise destinations and land-based attractions need to consider the relative effectiveness of their advertising campaigns and adjust their prices in order to compete with hotels and resorts. In addition, the cruise tourism industry will need to commit to new safety protocols that can dramatically reduce the risks arising from coronavirus and any new variants. Further, cruise operators will have to strengthen their investments in technology to facilitate more contactless customer service and enable enhanced logistical processes as the administration and coordination of a memorable experience for passengers will be more challenging given the need to take all necessary measures to prevent contagion.

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Having served as a *WHATT* theme editor, what did you enjoy about the experience?

We enjoyed planning and working together on this theme issue and working with a widely dispersed writing team from different institutions and backgrounds. We are also grateful to Richard Teare, *WHATT*'s managing editor, who is inspiring and easy to work with. Overall, it was a rewarding experience and together, we feel that we have been able to identify appropriate action steps in support of cruise tourism operators and destinations. *WHATT*'s approach enables this, and it is worthwhile because it brings together academics and practitioners to examine real world challenges.

About the Theme Editors:

Ibrahim A. Ajagunna, PhD, is Professor and Deputy to the President at the Caribbean Maritime University, Jamaica.

Matthew O. Ilori, PhD, is Professor of Microbial Biotechnology at the University of Lagos, Nigeria, and among other roles, he has served as the university's director, Institute of Maritime Studies.

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Worldwide Hospitality and Tourism Themes (WHATT) aims to make a practical and theoretical contribution to hospitality and tourism development, and we seek to do this by using a key question to focus attention on an industry issue. If you would like to contribute to our work by serving as a *WHATT* theme editor, do please contact the Managing Editor, Dr Richard Teare via the Emerald website.

Appendix: Theme issue contents (WHATT v14 n2 2022)

An analysis of post-pandemic scenarios: What are the prospects for the Caribbean cruise industry?

Ibrahim Ajagunna, Matthew Ilori and Eron Mclean

The cruise industry has been significantly impacted by the pandemic. Some cruise lines have downsized, and many have cancelled ship orders while some vessels have been put on retainers. It is still uncertain how long this situation will continue. The opening article provides an analysis of these, and other issues introduces the theme issue.

Cruising on choppy seas: the revitalization of Jamaica as a cruise destination post-COVID-19

Andrew J. Spencer and Diana Spencer

This theme explores strategies that are needed for the post-COVID period in cruise tourism with special reference to endemic gaps in the sustainable development of cruising in Jamaica which resulted in the pre-pandemic status quo. The aim is to recommend ways of creating a road map for greater sustainability for cruise tourism in the Caribbean.

An analysis of the post-COVID-19 cruise industry: Could this be a new possibility for the luxury yacht sector in the Caribbean?

Ibrahim Ajagunna and Sandra Casanova

This theme examines the prospects for the luxury yacht industry in the coming decade in contrast to those for mega cruise ships. Based on industry analysis and discussion with key stakeholders, the finding is that the luxury and sporting yacht categories are responding well – despite the pandemic – and will continue to do so.

Evaluating Jamaica's position as a seafarer supplying country for cruise and cargo

Deron Danario Wilson

This theme investigates Jamaica's position as a seafarer labour market through the prism of the industry's apparent scarcity of seafarers (officers), while examining Jamaica's maritime education and training system as a tool for nation-building. Findings point to a lack of maritime awareness among youth, as well as among stakeholders and policymakers.

Preparing the post-pandemic workforce for the cruise and hospitality industry

Evette Smith Johnson, Evora Mais Thompson and Nanibala I. Paul

This theme examines some of the professional workforce updating imperatives for cruise and hospitality staff during and after the pandemic. New and enhanced technological, health management and resilience skills are needed and a competency-based approach to professional updating, education and training is recommended.

An analysis of post-pandemic scenarios and prospects for the shipping industry: perspective from Guadeloupe

Mylène Ferriera

The maritime port in Guadeloupe, a French island in the Lesser Antilles, is set to be transformed into a major logistics hub catering to the Greater Caribbean and the Lesser Antilles. The article examines the various policies which have been implemented and the innovative ways used to achieve the logistics hub objectives.

Can Jamaica's cruise administrators re-strategize, strengthen inclusiveness, expand attractions and gather more revenue?

Eron McLean

This theme provides a perspective on how disconnected Caribbean islands are as reflected in the wide variance in head tax charged per tourism visit by each island. Caribbean governments should examine the various ways in which lack of integration has affected the region as a whole and agree on a framework for wider cooperation.

The Caribbean cruise industry and COVID-19: What planned strategic options exist for recovery for small Island countries?

Lanna Gaye Franklin-Green, Ibrahim Ajagunna and Meredith Natola

This theme examines the impact of the pandemic on the Caribbean cruise industry and assesses post-pandemic prospects for recovery. The study reveals the need for long-term planning and creative thinking by Caribbean countries if they are to remain viable cruise destinations.

Challenges confronting efficient port performance of selected countries in the Eastern Caribbean: What are the opportunities for Antigua and Barbuda?

Darwin Telemaque

This theme reviews the Antigua Port Authority's redevelopment initiative which is the first major port improvement project ever undertaken in the Eastern Caribbean. The fact that regional ports have

not improved in key areas appears to be affecting the ability of carriers to maintain their services to the region and so this new facility will make a difference.

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Training and re-certification of crew for the “new normal” in the cruise tourism industry: a Caribbean regional perspective

Yinusa Akintoye and Simone Cunningham-Heirs

This theme examines the need for training and re-certification of crew for the pandemic-related new normal and for a more sustainable cruise tourism industry. The study revealed that job losses have occurred among Caribbean nationals, and this is influencing lifestyle practices and family spending power.

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Surmounting challenges and breaking barriers: Will the cruise liners open up new frontiers in the new global village?

Matthew Ilori, Ibrahim Ajagunna, Peter Oluseyi, Aderonke Lawal-Are and Ogundipe

There are numerous pressures on the cruise tourism industry as in the recent past, many well-established cruise tourism locations have been turning tourists and ships away due to overtourism. It is argued here that now is the time to consider the introduction of new destinations.

Conclusion: What are the implications for the post-pandemic Caribbean cruise industry?

Ibrahim Ajagunna, Matthew Ilori and Eron Mclean

This theme issue sought to enable cruise ship owners and destination governments to critically assess the viability, vulnerability and responsiveness of Caribbean cruise tourism in the context of the pandemic. It argues that governments across the Caribbean will need to re-think how they work with the cruise industry to secure greater latitude in negotiations with the major cruise conglomerates. Close attention must also be paid to improving local infrastructure and to facilitating the involvement of more local people in providing tourists with an authentic Caribbean experience.