

The Nature and Logic of Quarantine Tourism: Observations from the Hospitality Sector in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Cyprus

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The authors acknowledge the support of Zainab Muborakshoeva, University of Central Asia, Khorog, Tajikistan

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Overview

- In December 2019, the COVID-19 virus was identified in China
- Governments around the world subsequently instituted restrictions to contain the virus
- As a result, there were massive reductions in occupancy rates in hotels, the hospitality entered an important crisis
- This paper is NOT about the impact of the virus and the restrictions on the hotel industry ... Instead, it looks into the role of the hospitality sector in hosting guests that needed to be put under quarantine
- The findings illustrate something about the role of the state, civil society, and the hospitality industry, responding to a sudden and serious crisis

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Tourism and the pandemic

- Tourism is an important industry globally
- In 2018, travel and tourism accounted for over 10% of global economic activity, was responsible for one in ten jobs globally, and was the second fastest growing sector in the world economy (World Travel & Tourism Council, 2020)
- In two of the countries we analyze here, travel, tourism, and hospitality are critical sectors of the economy (tables 1 & 2)

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Surveyed Countries and Tourism Importance

	Population	GDP per capita in USD	Tourism Arrivals (2019)	Tourism Arrivals/per local population	Tourism sector as percent of GDP
Kazakhstan	18.5 (million) (2019)	9,812 (2018)	8.8 million (2018)	0.48	3.9 (2016)
Kyrgyzstan	6.46 (million) (2019)	1,281 (2018)	0.423 million	0.07	1.6 (2017)
Northern Cyprus	0.326 (million)	15,000 (2013)	2 million	6.13	approx. 20 to 50 (current)
Rep. of Cyprus	0.876 (million)	32,093 (2019)	3.976 million	4.54	21.9 (2018)

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The History of Covid in Selected Countries

	Date of first COVID patient	Date of First stoppage of flights due to COVID	Number of COVID-related deaths cumulative up to end of May 2020	COVID deaths per 100,000 by end of May 2020
Kazakhstan	March 13	March 16	38	<1
Kyrgyzstan	March 18	March 17	16	<1
Northern Cyprus	March 10	March 14	4	1.23
Rep. of Cyprus	March 9	March 21	24	2

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Tourism and pandemic vulnerability

- The two political entities on the Island of Cyprus have massive tourism industries, relative to the other countries in this analysis
- In terms of political culture, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan are newer states that evolved out of the disintegration of the Soviet Union while the other entities on the Island of Cyprus did not
- The rapid onset of COVID came at almost the same time to all those countries in the analysis. Only 9 days separate the first case in Kyrgyzstan and the Republic of Cyprus, so the phenomenon of COVID is recent and happens at almost the exact same time in all countries under study here

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The academic literature 1/4

- There is a substantial academic literature that deals with political and other issues linked with influencing tourism flows (human rights, political conflict, crime)
- There is also a literature that deals with various shocks (economic or otherwise) and how tourism and hospitality deals with that
- Since the SARS (Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome) outbreak of 2003, there is a growing academic literature that delves into biosecurity and how travel, tourism, and hospitality have to deal with such threats
- There is very little literature on the role played by the hotels as such in this crisis situations – we found a couple of papers

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The academic literature 2/4

- For instance:

"The survival of hotels during disaster: A case study of Hong Kong in 2003" by Lo, Cheung and Law published in 2006 in the Asia Pacific Journal of Tourism Research

This paper offers an overview of the emergence of SARS in Hong Kong and the practices employed by hotels to survive during the crisis. The study utilizes primary data to add knowledge to the hospitality literature on crisis and disaster management (best practices).

BUT this paper does not address the issue of the use of hotels to host quarantined guests!

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The academic literature 3/3

- “Reducing onward spread of COVID-19 from imported cases: quarantine and ‘stay at home’ measures for travellers and returning residents to Singapore” by Chiew, Li, and Vernon
Letter to the Editor, Journal of Travel Medicine, April 2020

This short one page note describes the measures introduced by the Singapore government that included mandatory stays in government hotels for those returning from countries with high risk of importation of COVID-19 in March-April 2020.

Over 12000 hotel rooms were reserved for this purpose, travellers were transported directly from the airport to the hotels where they were not allowed to leave their individual rooms. The government was covering the hospitality costs.

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The academic literature 4/4

- No other academic publications were found that describe central government, regional or municipal strategies or private initiatives to host quarantined travelers or medical staff
- The present research aims to cover a gap in the literature
- We contribute four case studies in two very different regions: Europe and Central Asia

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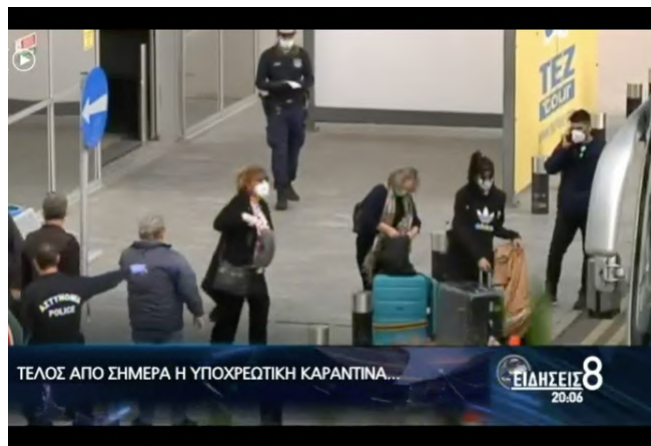
The case of the Republic of Cyprus (EU) 1/6

- The scheme started on 21/3 to repatriate Cypriot citizens and permanent residents
- Pressure from parents to repatriate their children who were studying abroad
- Cost to the government – €100,000 per flight
- Scheme motivated solely to solve a public health issue – not meant to be a subsidy to help the ailing hospitality industry

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The case of the Republic of Cyprus (EU) 2/6

- Police was escorting passenger to hotels
- Army was patrolling outside hotels to keep visitors and family at bay – legitimization of authority



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The case of the Republic of Cyprus (EU) 3/6

- Many hoteliers participated for altruistic reason, motivated by the desire to help the country in need (moral duty – corporate social responsibility)
- Not a business transaction but a civic act

"This scheme allowed our hotel to stress again that we care for our local community, our staff and our customers. For us it is a matter of social responsibility and we come out stronger as a nation and more united"

- Hotels did not experience problems finding staff willing to participate even though there was a lot of fear at that time because of the unknown

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The case of the Republic of Cyprus (EU) 4/6

- By mid-April 12 hotels had joined the scheme, then up to 37 hotels participated until 21/5 when 'normal flights' resumed
- There were no reported glitches except for parents abusing the call center:
"My daughter doesn't eat fish"

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The case of the Republic of Cyprus (EU) 5/6

- Hoteliers went beyond their call of duty to accommodate guests: shopping at the local supermarkets, special food requests, entertainment (bingo, film, music nights), daily telephone contacts to make sure guests were OK
- Very positive experience – guests left very happy (many recommendations on social media)
“When people enjoy a good experience under harsh conditions, they get connected to the place”
- Hotels used this positive experience for marketing: discount vouchers for summer vacation

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The case of the Republic of Cyprus (EU) 6/6

- *“These Hygiene protocols made us wiser”*: allowed the members of the hotel community in Cyprus to get acquainted with some of the tools that will matter in post-COVID hospitality business
- Until, October 2020, Cyprus enjoyed the lowest infection rates in the EU, it could portray itself as a safe place to spend holidays
- This quarantine hospitality experience opens a window of opportunity to re-think tourist offerings for discerning tourists:
 - sea, nature, beauty will matter more than hotel facilities (gyms, sauna, jacuzzi, pools) that guests will not dare to use anymore...
 - a step towards a more authentic tourism experience?

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The case of Northern Cyprus 1/4



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The case of Northern Cyprus 2/4

- In Northern Cyprus, quarantine hospitality occurred by urgent necessity
- On 18 March 2020, 750 tourists at Salamis Bay hotel quarantined because 18 German tourists tested positive
- April 30, 2020, the Merit Hotels Group became a quarantine hotel (it had initially rejected requests by the Government)
- The government paid €45 per day to hotels per quarantined guest
- The owner of Merit hotel Besim Tibuk donated 6,000 test kits and 3 respirators to the Ministry of Health

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The Case of Northern Cyprus 3/4

- The government offers financial support but relied on the collaboration of powerful hoteliers
- Northern Cyprus enjoyed a "corona free period" of 75 days until begin of July 2020
- Quarantine obligations at hotels and hostels were kept well into the month of September 2020
- Importance of the education sector – foreign students were allowed to enter the island on the condition of a 7 day quarantine in dormitories organized by universities

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The case of Northern Cyprus 4/4

- Published testimony of a journalist who was quarantined for 19 days and talked about her ordeal suggests lack of support and poor coordination with health authorities
- More research is needed – we relied on secondary data only
- Overall impression: reasonably managed crisis with help of private sector
- Crucial for the country because higher education and tourism are the sole pillars of this tiny island economy that otherwise depends on financial handouts from Turkey

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The case of Kazakhstan

- The story of Tekeli and Almaty
- Involvement of the local citizens
- Government response
- The effect on hospitality business



Image source: https://forbes.kz/process/medicine/karantinnyy_gospital_vid_iznutri/

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Accommodation service quality

Image source: <https://sun8-45.userapi.com/c622527/v622527059/3e8e/6AVMrt195Kw.jpg>

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The case of Kyrgyzstan

- The story of Bishkek
- Hotel "Dostuk"
- Hotel "Ak-keme"
- Hotel "Garden"

Source: <https://www.booking.com/hotel/kg/ak-keme-bishkek12345.html>

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COVID Responses through Quarantine Hospitality

	Level of coordination of actions between stakeholders	Role of the Central Government in Response to COVID in Tourism	Role of the Local Governments in Response to COVID in Tourism	Role of the Hoteliers/Hotel Managers in Response to COVID in Tourism	Evidence of Corporate Social Responsibility / Citizen Activism
Kazakhstan	poor coordination	weak	strong	strong	yes
Kyrgyzstan	poor coordination	weak	weak	strong	yes
Northern Cyprus	collaboration between the Ministry of Health and hoteliers	strong	n/a	strong	yes
Rep. of Cyprus	excellent collaboration between private and public actors	very strong well-funded	n/a	very strong	very significant

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Discussion

- Different countries – different strategies
- The two Central Asian countries in this study do not have an important tourism industry when compared to the island of Cyprus
- On the island of Cyprus, the central government played a key role in terms of organizing a response. The geographic size of the island and the importance of tourism seemed to ensure that government authority at all levels were involved in a response
- In all countries, hoteliers took an active role in coordinating a response
- In all countries, it seems that hoteliers and the hospitality industry's response comes from a sense of Corporate Social Responsibility, assisting citizens and supporting the needs of the hospitality industry

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Food for Thought

- The Island of Cyprus' response
 - Was it a function of the country's 1974 civil war/invasion with central government coordination in response to crisis?
 - Was it a function of the small size of the island and the proximity of the central government and the ability to organize responses to what the crisis demanded?
 - Was a sense of nationalism and civic responsibility a factor or the ability to pay?
 - Did the presence of a large tourism infrastructure make a coordinated and substantial response possible?
- The Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan response
 - Was it a function of the relative unimportance of tourism in the economy?
 - Was the geography of the country or political culture an impediment to a coordinated and substantial response from the central governments?

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Final Thoughts

- Covid is a continuing threat to travel, tourism, and hospitality.
- Policies to protect the consumer in travel, tourism, and hospitality are needed more than ever and will benefit industry.
- Government, at all levels, should reconsider its role to ensure not just that hotels and restaurants stay open during the crisis but that consumers and industry are protected once there is a return to normal.
- Government should plan on scenarios for subsequent waves of such pandemics to ensure that these vulnerable industries have the ability to weather future crises but also that they can thrive, once the crisis is over.
- While many of us thought that corporate social responsibility was just talk, this crisis shows that many in industry took the responsibility of corporations very seriously and acted in ways to support the local economy and society when needed.

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Thank You for Your Attention

Questions?

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