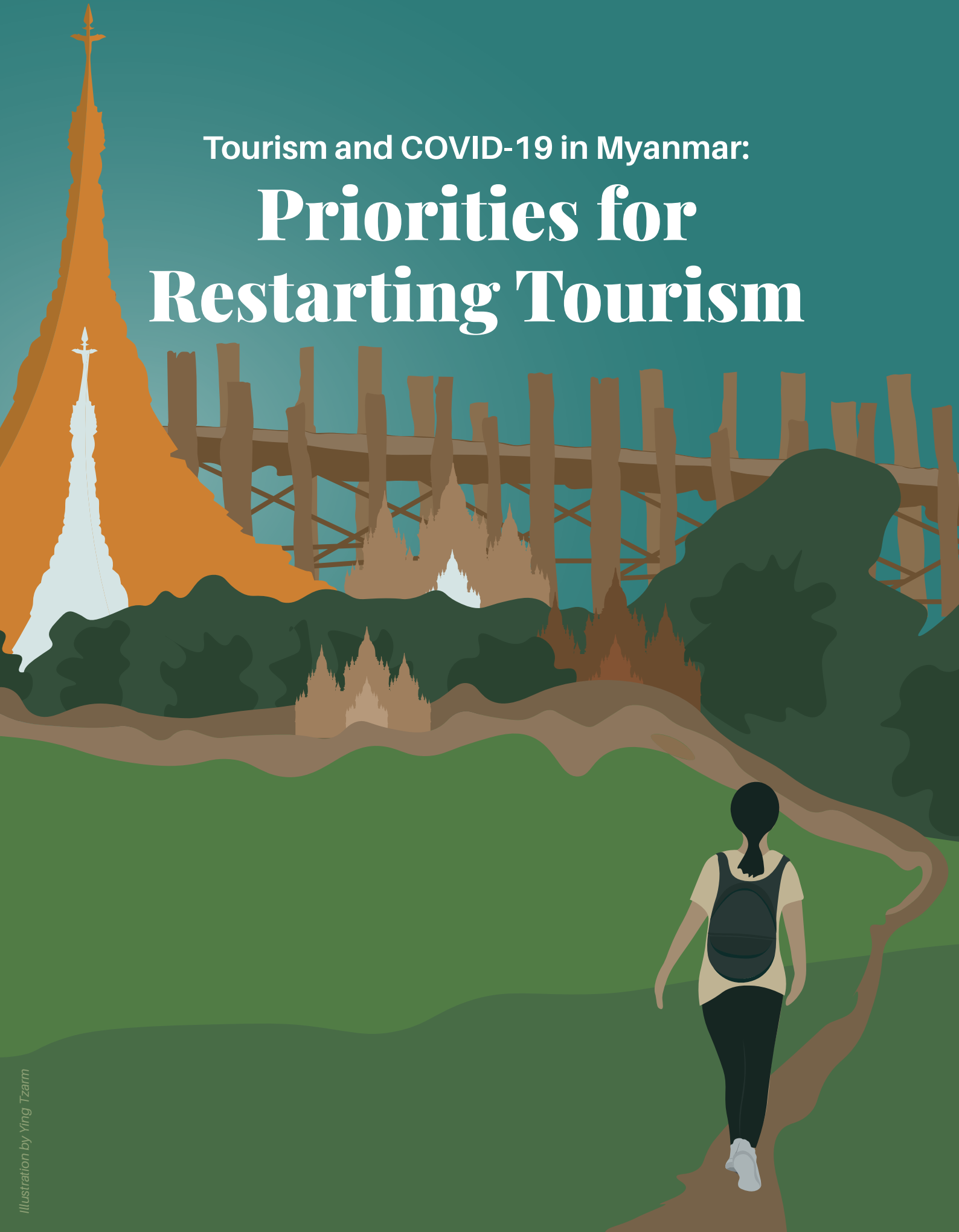


Tourism and COVID-19 in Myanmar:

# Priorities for Restarting Tourism



## WHITE PAPER


# Tourism and COVID-19 in Myanmar: Priorities for Restarting Tourism

First published in August 2020 by Myanmar Tourism Marketing (MTM), Hanns-Seidel-Foundation (HSF), Myanmar Centre for Responsible Business (MCRB) and Myanmar Responsible Tourism Institute (MRTI)

ISBN: 978-99971-937-7-3


### Email & Website


#### Myanmar Tourism Marketing (MTM)

 [info.mtm@tourismmyanmar.com](mailto:info.mtm@tourismmyanmar.com)


 [www.tourismmyanmar.com](http://www.tourismmyanmar.com)


#### Hanns Seidel Foundation (HSF)

 [myanmar@hss.de](mailto:myanmar@hss.de)


 [www.southeastasia.hss.de/myanmar](http://www.southeastasia.hss.de/myanmar)


#### Myanmar Centre for Responsible Business (MCRB)

 [info@myanmar-responsiblebusiness.org](mailto:info@myanmar-responsiblebusiness.org)

 [www.myanmar-responsiblebusiness.org](http://www.myanmar-responsiblebusiness.org)

#### Myanmar Responsible Tourism Institute (MRTI)

 [info@myanmarresponsibletourism.org](mailto:info@myanmarresponsibletourism.org)

 [www.myanmarresponsibletourism.org](http://www.myanmarresponsibletourism.org)

Authors: Dr. Nicole Häusler, Thu Thu Zaw

Burmese translator: Wut Yee Kyi Pyar

Illustrator / Designer: Ying Tzarm

All rights, including the right of reproduction, dissemination and translation, reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced in any form (including photocopying, recording, or otherwise) without the written permission of the publishers or processed using electronic systems, copied or distributed. The copyright for this publication in both English and Myanmar language lies with the publishers. The contributor by named author is solely responsible for the original English version of this publication and the contents do not necessarily reflect the opinion of the publisher.

Suggested Citation: *Nicole Häusler and Thu Thu Zaw. August 2020. White Paper. Tourism and COVID-19 in Myanmar. Priorities for Restarting Tourism. Yangon. Myanmar Tourism Marketing (MTM), Hanns-Seidel-Foundation (HSF), Myanmar Centre for Responsible Business (MCRB) and Myanmar Responsible Tourism Institute (MRTI)*

A stylized illustration in shades of teal and olive green. In the foreground, a person with a backpack is walking away from the viewer on a path. In the middle ground, a wooden bridge is shown in a state of disrepair, with many of its vertical support posts missing or broken. To the left of the bridge, a church spire with a cross on top is visible, partially obscured by the bridge's structure. The background features rolling hills and a dense forest of trees.

## Guiding Principles to Build Back Better

- Recover with confidence, through safety and security
- Rethink and redesign a more resilient, balanced, responsible, and sustainable tourism sector



# Introduction

The tourism industry, both globally and in Myanmar specifically, has been devastated by the impacts of coronavirus disease (COVID-19). This pandemic is having an unprecedented effect on economies and the ways in which consumers live, work, shop, and travel, as well as on their behaviors, attitudes, and incomes. During this crisis, tourist destinations everywhere will have to work harder than ever to reassure visitors that it is safe to travel. Moreover, traditional marketing approaches (e.g., trade shows) will no longer be feasible, leading to an acceleration in the use of digitalization and other technologies for promotional purposes, and unsustainable business models will likely fall by the wayside.

This White Paper offers ideas on how to mitigate the effects of COVID-19 on Myanmar's tourism sector. The ideas presented here are based on a series of online panel dialogues and discussions entitled "The COVID-19 Wave and Myanmar's Tourism Industry," which were held in May 2020 organized by Myanmar Tourism Marketing (MTM). The White Paper is intended to provide input for the Ministry's emerging outline for the Myanmar Tourism Strategy 2020–2025.

Every crisis presents opportunities. The global "reset" in response to COVID-19 offers an opportunity for Myanmar to rethink its tourism model to make it more resilient and more sustainable economically, socially, and environmentally, as well as better prepared for future crises. To achieve these goals Myanmar will require responsible and sustainable tourist destination management, in addition to minimizing and mitigating tourism's negative impacts and maximizing its positive impacts both on the local communities and on sustainability and environmental responsibility throughout the supply chain.

Now, and in the future, tourists will be seeking less crowded destinations. This is a chance for Myanmar to attract such visitors! During this crisis and afterward, tourism would benefit not only by ensuring direct and easy access to and within Myanmar and highlighting the country's unique offerings, but also by enhancing the existing safety standards for tourists. Such efforts must constitute key messages to be promoted in future marketing campaigns.

To be successful, this approach should involve the development of innovative products based on a thorough review of Myanmar's untapped tangible and intangible resources in accordance with the principles of responsibility and sustainability. Myanmar's diverse cultural heritage and its welcoming people are the country's richest assets. Thus, putting communities at the heart of the rebuilding efforts will be an important step in promoting tourism.

Given the interdependent nature of tourism services, the approach to reopening the tourism economy and rebuilding destinations will require coordination among several groups, including various government agencies at the state/regional and union levels, the private tourism sector, civil society organizations, and development partners. In this context, therefore, it is also important to strengthen local governance as we move forward.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

This White Paper offers the following seven recommendations for how to (1) recover with confidence, through safety and security, and (2) rethink and redesign a more resilient, balanced, responsible, and sustainable tourism sector:

	<i>Page</i>
 <b>Put Safety First</b>	<b>3</b>
 <b>Promote Domestic Tourism</b>	<b>5</b>
 <b>Adopt a Phased Approach for Reopening to International Travel</b>	<b>6</b>
 <b>Improve Destination Management and Market Segmentation</b>	<b>8</b>
 <b>Revise the Current Approach to Marketing and Promotion</b>	<b>9</b>
 <b>Build a Supportive Business Environment</b>	<b>10</b>
 <b>Invest in Human Resources—Managing Talent During and After COVID-19</b>	<b>11</b>



# 1. Put Safety First

The Ministry of Hotels and Tourism (MoHT)'s COVID-19 Tourism Relief Plan and its COVID-19 Tourism Guidelines have identified ways to restart tourism in a safe and responsible manner. In this White Paper, we recommend the following update to this plan as a step toward building trust and confidence by drawing on Myanmar's experience as well as on relevant examples from other countries.

Given the unforeseeable dynamics of the spread of COVID-19, the respective periods for the three strategies—Survival, Reopening, Relaunch—should be defined not according to dates (April/June, June/August; August 2020–January 2021), as outlined in the current Tourism Relief Plan, but rather by key parameters of the dynamic phase. These parameters should define the phases for the reopening of and planning for Myanmar tourism destinations over the next 12 to 24 months at the national, regional, and local levels. They are based on COVID-19-specific core health indicators (e.g., continued concern about the number of infections in the country, the recording of no new infections in the country within the last “X” weeks, relaxation of quarantine restrictions, availability of a vaccine, infection rates in other countries).

These indicators should also be used to assess when and how to reopen the country to international visitors (both business and leisure travelers). A full opening of the country will depend on the accessibility of a vaccine for COVID-19, which will also mark the start of the next high season for international tourism in Myanmar. Therefore, we need to be realistic and assume that the recovery phase for international tourism—and perhaps even regional tourism—may be postponed for one year and may not resume until September 2021.

Key changes that will affect international tourism are dependent on the following health parameters:

- reopening of the international airports in Yangon, Nay Pyi Taw, and Mandalay;
- resumption of commercial flights;
- a change to, or ending of, restrictions, including the abrogation of quarantine;
- testing prior to, or on, visitors' arrival.

Businesses (including resident business owners) and leisure travelers will have different attitudes about quarantining visitors upon their arrival. For short-term business travelers (although not for residents), the need to self-isolate for one to two weeks would be a deterrent. Any requirement to self-isolate, even for a single day, would discourage most leisure tourists from visiting Myanmar. Clear, accurate, up-to-date, and accessible communications regarding the most current requirements are essential, including the modalities needed for hotel quarantine.

All decisions regarding health and safety parameters must be made and implemented in close cooperation with the Ministry of Health and Sports (MoHS). In addition, steps must be taken to ensure that the correct health and hygiene protocols are in place and that tourism facilities are monitored and inspected on a regular basis. It is also advisable to introduce COVID-19 safeguards, such as specific management guidelines to prepare tour operators (TO) and tour guides, the accommodation sector, and transportation services in the

## KEY TERMS:

*Updating the Tourism Relief Plan; key parameters that determine dynamic phases; core health indicators; quarantining; close cooperation with MoHS; introduction of COVID-19 safeguards; avoidance of discriminatory approaches; reinforcement of Myanmar's "safe and secure" brand; QR codes for tracing tourists; data protection; establishment of guest-list information systems*

event of an outbreak of the disease within their groups and to provide background information on hospitals situated in tourism areas that can responsibly treat affected patients. These safeguards include a COVID-19 Contingency and Risk Mitigation Plan. Knowledge-based support regarding healthcare in the context of tourism is available from the Myanmar Tourism Healthcare and General Services Association (MTHGSA), an associated member of the Myanmar Tourism Federation (MTF).

If Myanmar decides to allow international travelers to enter the country (including those on quarantined relief flights), the primary site of control should be at the border. The health risks associated with COVID-19 are posed by travelers from high-prevalence foreign countries and are not related to an individual's nationality. Therefore, in-country precautions such as wearing masks and disinfecting surfaces should be applied to everyone or not at all, based on their effectiveness, thus avoiding discrimination. In other words, these measures should not apply to "foreigners only." This discriminatory approach (which has been suggested for visitors to the Shwedagon) has no scientific basis and would stigmatize foreigners and promote fear.

Where preventive measures are required, particularly visible ones (e.g., the wearing of masks on public transport and in enclosed spaces), they must be enforced—both to reduce the risk of infection and to reinforce Myanmar's "safe and secure" brand. Images posted on social media should reflect the country's effective safeguards, whereas depicting lax safety measures would undermine trust in the country's ability to take the proper precautions.

Before tracking or contact tracing of tourists is initiated using Quick Response (QR) codes or COVID apps (e.g., the Myanmar Computer Federation's Saw Saw Shar), several questions need to be considered concerning data protection: What is the intention of tracking or tracing? What health/safety objectives will it achieve? How effective is it? Does it provide good data security and meet the principles of personal protection? For example, if the aim is to trace all staff and guests in a restaurant, hotel, or guesthouse or who are using modes of transport on a particular date and at a specific time, the minimal relevant information about their presence and identity (e.g., name, phone number) should be obtained from everyone concerned and not just from foreign travelers. Visitors may be willing to voluntarily submit information to apps such as Saw Saw Shar if they are satisfied with its approach to privacy.

Myanmar's existing system for registering guests at hotels/guesthouses and reporting these to MOLIP already provides significant data. It should not be necessary to establish new requirements for guest information by accommodation providers.



## 2. Promote Domestic Tourism

In the current “survival phase” of the pandemic, with restrictions on international flights to Myanmar, the country’s travel industry will need to prioritize the promotion of domestic travel, including that of resident foreigners. COVID-19 has resulted in unprecedented safety concerns and a reduction in disposable income so that the citizens of Myanmar may be reluctant to travel long distances, which creates a potential market for in-country recreational facilities near Myanmar’s larger cities such as Mandalay and Yangon.

Before domestic commercial flights resume operations at certain destinations, the aviation sector must be informed about current and potential travel volumes and any associated benefits. Tour operators must be informed about the availability of new domestic flights a few weeks in advance to ensure long-term security planning for their clients.

More data will be needed to understand spending patterns and behavior with respect to the domestic travel market, as well as the changing economic situation in Myanmar. Such information will be useful in selecting the appropriate products to offer local tourists and to determine whether citizens would be willing to spend their income on a vacation while in the midst of an economic recession.

Domestic travel surveys initiated and implemented by MoHT and/or MTF are needed at the national, state, and regional levels. These assessments can then be used to elicit changes in travel preferences as a consequence of COVID-19, which has restricted international travel by both local and foreign residents in Myanmar.

It is important to raise awareness among the general population, domestic travelers, and local vendors about the negative impacts of litter and single-use plastics, which not only harm the environment but also compromise hygiene and the aesthetics of a tourist destination. Promotional campaigns should strongly encourage people to say “no” to plastic and to substitute locally available “green” products. In addition, waste-collection management systems must be set up at tourism hotspots to ensure clean and hygienic surroundings for visitors. Awareness-raising activities to reduce the use of plastics can be conducted with the help of organizations that lead in plastic waste reduction as well as “green activists” such as Inle Lake Young Ambassadors, Thant Myanmar, and Trash Hero.

### **KEY TERMS:**

*Creation of recreational facilities near larger cities; domestic tourism surveys; environmental awareness campaign*

### 3. Adopt a Phased Approach for Reopening to International Travel

After the “survival period”, a phased reopening to international travel is expected. This phase will set out an approach for the gradual lifting of restrictions on travel into Myanmar based on criteria still to be defined, such as the epidemiological status of a foreign country. Criteria can be as follows:

- Close to or below the average number of new COVID-19 cases in Myanmar over the past 14 days and per 100,000 inhabitants.
- A stable or decreasing trend in new cases over the same period compared with the previous 14 days.
- The overall response to COVID-19 by the foreign country of origin, taking into account available information on such aspects as testing, surveillance, contact tracing, containment, treatment, and reporting, as well as the reliability of available information and data sources.

Travel restrictions for a specific foreign country may be totally or partially lifted or may be reintroduced based on changes in the assessment of that country’s epidemiological situation (see the criteria referred to above). Should the situation in a foreign country worsen quickly, rapid decision-making will be needed. Therefore, every two weeks, the list of foreign countries should be reviewed and, as the case may be updated, by the National-Level Central Committee for Prevention, Control and Treatment of Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) after close consultation with various Ministries, such as the Ministry of Hotels and Tourism (MoHT), Ministry of Labour, Immigration and Population (MoLIP) and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA).

Although we welcome the announcement by this Committee concerning healthcare guidelines for foreigners who are planning to travel to Myanmar for professional reasons while temporary travel restrictions continue to apply to foreign countries, we suggest that, during this reopening phase, the capacity of the current quarantine facilities will be extended in Yangon. Travelers can then choose whether to stay in a hotel of higher quality if they are willing to cover the expenses of a minimum seven-day stay in quarantine. A list of such hotels should be available online prior to their arrival to ensure both a smooth booking procedure and a COVID-safe transfer to the hotel once the number of available quarantine beds there has been confirmed.

Foreign professionals/business travelers would feel safer about returning to Myanmar if an evacuation plan has been arranged between Myanmar and Thailand (or some other third country that can provide high-level medical services) in the event of a medical emergency. A joint-venture agreement could be signed between Myanmar and Thai

institutions to provide for such medical emergency plans, which would of course be available to all Myanmar and foreign citizens (all of whom would ideally have health insurance that would cover the costs of such emergency transfers).

The reopening phase may also include regional “travel bubbles” (e.g., Mekong/ASEAN countries, Korea, Japan, and China) and then long-haul travel. Travel bubbles, also known as travel corridors or corona corridors, are essentially an exclusive partnership between neighboring or nearby countries that have demonstrated considerable success in containing and combating the COVID-19 pandemic within their respective borders. These countries then go on to reestablish these connections by opening up their borders and allowing people to travel freely within the zone without having to undergo on-arrival quarantine. Bilateral travel arrangements may define the conditions of these bubbles, which could be accompanied by strategies for cooperation between border guard authorities, bilateral marketing, and airline connections.

Introducing a visa waiver program or a reduction in visa fees in coordination with immigration departments is also highly recommended as a way to attract international visitors.

The COVID-19 reset offers Myanmar the chance to rethink its approach to Chinese tourists that would yield greater benefit for Myanmar, including not only economic benefits but also extend the visitors’ appreciation of Myanmar’s unique culture. “Zero-dollar” or “zero-budget” tours for Chinese tourists should no longer be an option for incoming groups. Such packages cannot be considered “sustainable” because they offer minimal benefit to Myanmar (specifically the local tourism supply chain), since most of the money spent by Chinese tourists is leaked to foreign (Chinese) companies. In addition, unlicensed Chinese-speaking people who serve as guides have limited knowledge about the duties of a professional tour guide, the culture and history of Myanmar, and the tourism industry in general. Myanmar needs to encourage more local people to train to be licensed tour guides to serve Chinese tourists. Furthermore, it is recommendable to coordinate with Government of People’s Republic of China and/or Chinese travel organisations/associations to set up ‘Dos and Don’ts’ for Chinese tourists.

The planning of all these activities should involve a demand-driven approach and must be based on in-depth research concerning the market and the types of travelers that Myanmar seeks to attract both in the short run and in the long run, which includes as well a better understanding of the demand for visits of community-based tourism villages.

In order to sort out the data collected and the results of market research, MoHT and/or MTF should take the lead and delegate relevant institutions, associations, development organizations to assume these tasks. The Ministries can then proceed with monitoring and evaluating the findings and produce the final results in cooperation with the duly assigned research organization(s).

#### **KEY TERMS:**

*Phased reopening; capacity of quarantine facilities; evacuation plan; travel bubbles; bilateral travel agreements; visa waivers; elimination of zero-dollar tours; demand-driven approach; in-depth market research coordinated by MoHT or MTF*

## 4. Improve Destination Management and Market Segmentation

Tourist destinations should devote more time and effort to the management of responsible and sustainable tourism, which includes improving the quality of existing products and preparing for the “new normal.” In order to adapt to new travel trends, they should consider the importance of competitiveness and destination readiness along the tourism supply chain. Destination managers in particular (i.e., MoHT, regional tourism committees, destination management committees) will need to help villagers who are involved in community-based tourism (CBT) projects to prepare for “the new normal.” The needs and voices of the local people must be taken into account; for example, some may not want to receive visitors, but those who do will need support on implementing safe measures in receiving visitors. Specific capacity-building in terms of COVID-19 safety standards must be offered to those who will come into contact with tourists during village visits (e.g., artisans, village guides, cooks).

In tourism hotspots such as Bagan, visitor management plans should be created to avoid crowded conditions that would place tourists and local visitors at risk during special events (e.g., religious festivals, sunset sites).

To support sustainable management, existing tourism zone entrance fees must be reviewed and should be either reinvested directly in sustainable tourism management at the respective tourism destinations and/or replaced by new income mechanisms (e.g., a bed tax for domestic and international travelers), which would ideally be managed at the regional level by the local destination management committees/organizations and reinvested in responsible and sustainable tourism management of the respective destination.

In order to achieve all these goals, it is recommended that decentralization of tourism governance be promoted by shifting more responsibilities toward state and even local governments. Roles, responsibilities, and tasks must be clearly defined for all the various tourism committees (both horizontal and vertical) within the tourism governance system.

Members of the township-level destination management committees from civil society and the private and public sectors should be selected during transparent public-private dialogues, with a gender-balanced membership setup. Given that these members are often not skilled in the complexities of the tourism industry, we encourage the development of training tools for these destination managers (e.g., members of regional tourism and/or destination management committees) on topics such as the implementation of responsible tourism products, marketing and communication, food safety and hygiene, and the like, ideally with support from development partners.

However, we also encourage discussion of the establishment of destination management organizations (DMOs) instead of committees, with an office and a trained full-time staff. Their work should be monitored by a board that includes members of the public and private

sectors and civil society organizations and that convenes at least twice a year. In administrative matters, the staff of such DMOs would have to report to the General Administration Department (GAD) and/or MoHT. It is vital for either the committees or the DMO to secure a budget for their work in order to ensure efficient and effective destination management.

Concerning market segmentation, the focus should no longer be exclusively on the four major destinations (Yangon, Mandalay, Inle Lake, and Bagan) but rather on ecotourism and outdoor and adventure tourism activities. These are expected to appeal to both the domestic market and international travelers once they can return to Myanmar (see Recommendation 6 below).

Building on the initial offerings in these market segments, new products should gradually be introduced, such as zip lining, rock climbing, agrotourism (including farm-to-table tourism), bird watching and nature tours, caving, cycling, and water sports (white-water rafting, canoeing, diving). For this purpose, it will be necessary to follow a more demand-driven approach in order to reconsider the focus on the mass market and to identify a new source-market mix. At the same time, efforts must be made to ensure that such new (outdoor) products are safe and do not present licensing issues or conflict with other administrative processes. To avoid potential problems with licensing, governments should encourage entrepreneurs to implement such outdoor activities and support their initiative.

## 5. Revise the Current Approach to Marketing and Promotion

The character of trade shows—the classical marketing tool for tourism—will change, at least for the next few years, assuming they will take place at all. Marketing and promotional activities will focus primarily on digital marketing, e-commerce, online tour agencies, and virtual marketing (e.g., virtual tours).

Because many of tourism's enterprises still underestimate the importance of digitalization, there will be a need for greater capacity-building and awareness campaigns to help small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) understand the importance of digital marketing in "the new normal."

Since government resources are limited, all governmental marketing and promotion must be planned carefully and discussed with the private sector. A sizeable proportion of the budget should be provided by governments at the national and state levels. This includes marketing campaigns that focus exclusively on domestic travelers in order to encourage the citizens of Myanmar (who may no longer be able to travel easily overseas but may have the funds) to discover their own country, especially new and more remote destinations.

To design effective marketing campaigns, it will be very important to collect data and carry out research in cooperation with universities and/or tourism institutes to determine trends in individual market

### **KEY TERMS:**

*Destination readiness along the supply chain, including community-based tourism (CBT); visitor management plans; review of tourist zone entrance fees; development of new income mechanisms to support sustainable tourism development; promotion of decentralization of tourism governance; training of destination managers; destination management organizations; reconsidering market segregation; creation of new ecotourism and adventure products relying on a demand-driven approach and entrepreneurs' initiatives*

#### **KEY TERMS:**

*Digital marketing; awareness campaign for tourism SMEs; marketing plan based on data collection and market research; available marketing budget; tourism stakeholders' readiness; cooperation with professional PR companies*

segments. Without the use of baseline data and market insights to identify and prioritize high-value market segments, marketing resources will be wasted.

In addition to implementing a marketing plan, it will also be necessary to ensure the readiness of tourism's stakeholders (the hotel, restaurant, transport, tour guide, and products sectors) and the local communities while doing promotional campaigns for new products.

The key activity during the COVID-19 pandemic will be to introduce new products and current tourism activities by presenting creative video clips, appropriate imagery, and interesting travel blogs on all available media channels and in cooperation with professional public relations (PR) companies.

## **6. Build a Supportive Business Environment**

To support the tourism sector's economic recovery, a relaxation of taxes, license fees, and leasing rates for tourism businesses is highly recommended. The government should continue to reinforce coordination mechanisms, especially to support tourism SMEs, and should offer special financial (loan) support for licensed guides during the recovery phase.

However, ongoing subsidized loans should be provided only to companies likely to repay them in the medium term. Some traditional tour operator models, already disrupted as online booking has become more readily available, will need to either reorient their offerings to be commercially sustainable or exit the sector. In order to understand the evolution of the market and how to restructure, businesses need support and access to market data (see Recommendation 3 above), which include reliable statistics on tourism's contributions to the gross domestic product (GDP), job creation, and economic impacts along the supply chain.

Transport is an essential service in the tourism value chain, and the transport sector should be given a more prominent role within the existing tourism committees. The government should provide support to transportation companies, including buses and airlines, some of which are at risk for bankruptcy; the aviation sector, however, requires significant funding, which will most likely have to be provided by international investors. The removal of commercial restrictions that prevent airline companies from restructuring and obtaining international capital will ensure that Myanmar can reestablish a competitive and functioning domestic aviation market.

The COVID-19 pandemic has provided the tourism sector with the opportunity to enhance the "ease of doing business" and facilitate responsible investment on the part of existing local and foreign investors, as well as by new entrants, in accordance with the Myanmar Comprehensive Economic Relief Plan (CERP). This opportunity could include a review of permitting requirements, based on discussions with businesses, that is designed to simplify red tape and the associated costs. MoHT's Corruption Prevention Unit, established with the encouragement of the Anti-Corruption Commission, could take the



lead in undertaking such a review along with input from the private sector. One objective should be to shift at least some administrative procedures online, thus increasing efficiency by reducing red tape and the risk of corruption.

Also, because complex land law requirements are a problem for both investors in tourism and local communities, the tourism sector should play a part in the ongoing review of land law requirements led by the Attorney General's Office.

Indeed, the successful implementation of all these activities will require a robust public-private dialogue between the public sector (the MoHT and other affiliated ministries) and the private tourism sector, including members of the MTF and the Union of Myanmar Federation of Chambers of Commerce and Industry (UMFCCI), as well as engagement with development partners and local organizations. Multistakeholder partnerships, particularly at the destination level, will increase the resources and capacities available to restart and strengthen the tourism sector. These partnerships will be successful only if all roles and responsibilities are clearly defined and if they are fulfilled by everyone involved.

#### **KEY TERMS:**

*Relaxation of taxes, license fees, and leasing rates; financial support of tourism SMEs and guides; special support for transport services; removal of commercial restrictions on airline companies; review of permitting requirements in cooperation with the MoHT's Corruption Prevention Unit; review of land law requirements; implementation of institutional dialogues*

## **7. Invest in Human Resources—Managing Talent During and After COVID-19**

In addition to digital marketing, a major priority in capacity-building is in the areas of digitalization and hygiene and safety standards. This component involves all sectors in the tourism value chain, including aviation, ground transportation, hotels, restaurants, tour guides, informal tourism workers (e.g., horse-cart and boat drivers), excursions, and visits to local villages. Government agencies and the private sector should work with development partners to offer appropriate training for all those involved in the tourism supply chain to help them adapt to the crisis, which includes the use of training manuals on how to be a good host.

In addition, tourism research is needed (a) to learn how to utilize the skills of returning migrant workers and (b) to understand the social and economic situation of the people who work in the tourism sector, particularly young people.

With regard to the private sector, especially hotels and tour operators, the element most relevant to the corporate value of tourism is caring for employees. Staff-retention strategies (e.g., payment of minimum wage, a reduction in higher salaries by 30% to 50%) need to be developed to avoid a surge in unemployment and a substantial shortage of trained and skilled staff in the hospitality and tourism sector. A determination to maintain a positive attitude toward employees throughout the COVID-19 crisis by understanding their experiences and ensuring their welfare is crucial for the recovery phase. Good employer handling can lead to a competitive edge in the

### **KEY TERMS:**

*Capacity-building to adjust to “the new normal” (digitalization, hygiene and safety standards); tourism research; support for tourism employees and informal tourism workers; stimulus and aid packages; reduce legal barriers and increase aid to informal tourism workers.*

post-pandemic phase. Besides, employees do not forget when they are supported during tough periods.

In Myanmar, the instability and lack of legal protections inherent in informal employment will leave many workers, especially women, particularly exposed to the sharp downturn in tourism trade and the consequent loss of receipts. Stimulus and aid packages must be put in place to ensure that informal employees are eligible for relief and support measures to avoid adversely disadvantaging this workforce. Additional strategies must be developed to support informal tourism workers, such as the horse-cart drivers in Bagan or the boat drivers at Inle, whose services will again be in great demand. Specifically, governments should reduce legal barriers and increase access to financial aid for this group.



# How was this White Paper put together?

MTM held a total of 10 webinars that included various speakers and moderators who represented industry leaders, stakeholders, development partners, and government officials. During the online panel discussions, MTM collected and summarized the important points made in order to analyze them. This White Paper is the outcome of MTM's analysis, and the conclusions drawn were used to offer recommendations concerning the tourism industry in Myanmar both during and after the COVID-19 pandemic.

In preparing this White Paper and in organizing the Task Force, MTM worked closely with the Myanmar Responsible Tourism Institute (MRTI), the Myanmar Centre for Responsible Business (MCRB), and the Hanns Seidel Foundation (HSF). The Task Force included representatives from MTM, MTF, MCRB, MRTI, and HSF, as well as a participant from the Tourism Development Planning Academy (2019) with a background in new sustainable product development; an international expert, and a national expert. Guided by the Task Force, the initial draft was continuously developed over the course of five meetings, and additional issues related to COVID-19 and the further development of tourism in Myanmar were integrated based on the outcomes of the intense debates during these meetings.

The final draft was presented to a wider audience during a webinar on July 24, 2020. After additional topics were integrated into the document, the final version was approved by the Task Force on July 31, 2020.





myanmar  
TOURISM FEDERATION  
MYANMAR TOURISM MARKETING  
[tourismmyanmar.org](http://tourismmyanmar.org)

myanmar  
TOURISM FEDERATION



[southeastasia.hss.de/myanmar](http://southeastasia.hss.de/myanmar)



[myanmar-responsiblebusiness.org](http://myanmar-responsiblebusiness.org)



[myanmarresponsibletourism.org](http://myanmarresponsibletourism.org)

