

Time to be Bold

Dear Stakeholder:

Increasingly, we are encouraged by tourism stakeholders thinking differently and acting boldly.

One might argue a health catastrophe that has made daily life totally unrecognisable requires a conservative road back to familiar territory. But if this crisis is teaching us anything, it's this: there's no true normalcy to return to.

Credit is due to Finance Minister Curtis Dickinson who made an early call for bold ideas to help transform Bermuda's economy. The Bermuda Tourism Authority is responding. In fact, two of our organisation's revised 2020 strategic priorities address this:

- Re-engage stakeholders via the National Tourism Plan to rebuild and reimagine business services safely and responsibly for the benefit of Bermuda's visitors and community alike
- Make Bermuda easier to experience by stimulating and supporting continued innovations post-crisis. It appears the tourism community is listening.

As Phase 2 inspires more restaurants to restart their businesses with alfresco dining, we are having fruitful conversations with audacious partners ready to take things further. If a restaurant can only achieve a small fraction of its capacity (and revenue) when moving outside, why not allow it to expand into public squares, on to sidewalks, or spill into a temporarily closed street? While we're at it, why not liberalise alfresco liquor-licensing laws, too?

I'm not sure how many of these things are actually achievable; we don't know yet where the resistance to change will come from (it's Bermuda—it always comes). But we do know these improvements would greatly enhance the visitor experience when the time is right to welcome them again. Make no mistake though, the same innovations would also create legacy benefits for local residents and business owners.

Anyone with a well-crafted, carefully thought out tourism-related plan that pushes the envelope and gets people back to work has the attention of the BTA. The time we're in demands it.

Let's not restrict ourselves to food and beverage.

We'll need to re-open to regularly scheduled flights and cruise ships as soon as it's safe to do so, of course. But what if we could also influence a fully electronic and frictionless arrival process for visitors and offer cashless, contactless transactions to get them safely, and more efficiently, where they're going around our island?

Long-suffering retail stores will open their doors again—but think of the gains if we lifted deep-rooted red tape that blocks this sector from its full potential. Besides, how can we aspire toward waterfront projects in Hamilton and St. George's if there's not a vibrant retail sector at the core?

In a post-COVID society, the global consumer landscape will be revolutionised. Will Bermuda be? We need to be ready. Authorising digital platforms and equipment, enacting nimble legislation and 'thinking like a visitor' were already embedded in the National Tourism Plan. Now they can help design a robust new reality.

BTA executives are privileged to be contributing voices in several discussions about our country's recovery. These talks are happening literally every day. As Minister Dickinson says, everything should be on the table. He means it. We consider a rapidly constructed unemployment benefit and a recently announced duty deferment package for retail to be two worthy examples.

The right moves over the next few months can offer transformative long-term growth for all parts of our economy, but especially for tourism. These moves will start with quiet conversations and small steps; they can deliver quick wins and important progress.

Brave vision. Decisive action. Bold innovation. Those are the marching orders of the day, because for our industry, the goal can't be merely survival; this is our chance to change the game.
Sincerely,

Glenn Jones

Interim CEO & Chief Experience Development Officer

