"The COVID-19 pandemic has swiftly and thoroughly thrown the travel and tourism industry globally into a crisis, the likes of which has never been seen before. Even when compared to the Global Economic Crisis of 2009, the SARS epidemic of 2003 and the September 11 terrorist attacks in 2001 in USA, those impacts dwarf in comparison to the fallout of this current crisis. There is no question that tourism is among the sectors hit hardest by this crisis, but it is also at the heart of the recovery," states Mrs. Heidi Alert, Chief Executive Officer (Ag.) of Tourism Trinidad Limited (TTL).

A return to travel is critical for the global economy as travel and tourism account for 11% of the world’s GDP and create more than 320 million jobs for workers serving 1.4 billion travellers annually. Globally, tourist arrivals for the first quarter of 2020 are down 22.4% and arrivals in March 2020 alone has shown a decline of 57%. The Caribbean has already recorded the 6th largest percentage decline in tourist arrivals in the world (by subregion). The challenge ahead for Trinidad tourism sector lies in two (2) phases - first in weathering the impact of COVID-19 as the sector has taken a severe blow and secondly in rebuilding. It is anticipated that recovery will come firstly from a domestic staycation perspective and then international travellers can be encouraged to come visit as international travel is likely to be heavily restricted for some time.

Tourism Trinidad Limited has taken the opportunity during this “stay at home” period to rethink the entire way we approach tourism to deliver a sector which is financially self-sustaining in the longer term. In this regard, Tourism Trinidad has developed a draft “Go to Market Strategy” and we will be holding extensive consultations with tourism stakeholders to discuss this plan. It is essential that the private sector be at the centre of discussions from the initial planning phase.

Moreover, Tourism Trinidad will be launching a series of online training programs for the industry to hone their skills and improve their qualifications.

TTL currently has an active digital media campaign to reassure and engage consumers and the trade, provide nostalgia moments, as well as to reintroduce Destination Trinidad to the world. This is all in keeping with the wider regional and international tourism messaging of resilience, hope, and a commitment to safe travel.

Our social media platforms are showcasing and promoting virtual concerts with our local soca artists, displaying riveting photography of our natural and built heritage, recipes of our world-renowned street foods and virtual tours of our sites and attractions so that Destination Trinidad remains top of mind. The hashtags #TravelTomorrow #CaribbeanDreaming #TrinidadDreaming #VisitTrinidad are being used on social media channels to lift spirits and help travellers plan their next holiday in Trinidad... when the time is right.
Fungi are often described as being the “fifth kingdom of life on Earth,” they are neither plant nor animal, microbe nor protista. The larger fungi or macro fungi are popularly referred to as mushrooms and are the fruiting and sporing body of fungi. They play a major role as decomposers and recyclers for nutrients (eg. nitrogen, phosphorus) in the wide variety of ecosystems. Mushrooms, perhaps the most easily recognizable forms of fungi, have been hailed as the latest superfoods, while some experts have said fungi may even have the potential to save the world from humanity’s worst excesses.

A passionate environmental advocate, Jeffrey Wong Sang explained that most people refer to him as “The Crazy Mushroom Man” because of the strangeness of his hobby which has now grown to be an integral part of his tours. This journey into “mushroaming” first started with his self-initiated cleaning up of the Bamboo Cathedral in Chaguaramas. It was during one of his many expeditions to that area, in 2011, that his unorthodox interest in fungi was awakened and he then began to utilize his photographic abilities to capture the amazing local variety of fungi in order to raise awareness about their enormous potential.

For Jeffrey, “there is no life without fungi and mushrooming. It is a product of my passionate love for nature and travel. It is a really great opportunity for me to educate our youth and I love interacting with people who are eager to explore new territory and are open to take in new experiences and enjoy the wonders of nature and travel.”

He went on to add “I am just overwhelmed by the physical beauty of fungi and what started off as a photographic exercise has now blossomed into a full-fledged science project where I have started to document and preserve these mushrooms”.

Jeffrey is hopeful that further local technical research into the medicinal and healing properties of mushrooms, as well as other uses, can result in the development of a new revenue earning product stream.

Perhaps one of Jeffrey’s greatest achievements is his collection of samples of mushrooms (and photographs) to document Trinidad and Tobago’s fungi biodiversity for eventual scientific identification, as well as the development of his Facebook page “Mushrooms of Trinidad and Tobago” which helps in crowd sourcing photos and information on mushrooms. He has also mounted several mushroom displays in malls, schools, and scientific fairs, focusing on teaching children how to be active and responsible citizens of the planet, so that they become the strong, active and empowered adults who are inheriting our planet.

The mushroom photos of Jeffrey Wong Sang have been featured on the website of National Geographic, the and scientific fora; focusing on teaching children how to be active and responsible citizens of the planet, so that they become the strong, active and empowered adults who are inheriting our planet.

The mushroom photos of Jeffrey Wong Sang have been featured on the website of National Geographic, the global nonprofit organization committed to exploring and protecting our planet. He reflected that “COVID-19 has forced tour guides to re-think their tours … we need new tours … we have to turn this thing inside out and upside down. The old norm is not going to work. We have to get people excited!”

Thanks to Jeffrey Wong Sang, interest in mushrooming to re-connect with the magical and amazing rich flora and fauna of Trinidad is growing beyond a few specialists.

ONLINE LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES

Ready to Re-open? How the Caribbean Tourism Industry Should Prepare for the Tourism Restart. This webinar will discuss the latest developments for tourism recovery, repercussions of air travel in the Caribbean and presentation of social sentiment data and insights illustrating what consumers in the United States expect from hotels and attractions in the Caribbean in a post-COVID-19 world. May 19, 2020 3:00pm

Tips for Leaders during Turbulent Times. Starting at 10.00am on May 19, this webinar is organised by the Caribbean Export. Visit www.carib-export.com/webinars to register and view past webinars.

TIPS TO MANAGE STRESS

- Stay active… take time for daily walks in open well ventilated spaces
- Practice meditation or do yoga
- Get as much sleep and relaxation
- Avoid tobacco, drugs, and alcohol
- Eat healthy, well-balanced meals
- Drink lots of water
- Avoid obsessing over endless Coronavirus media coverage. Pay attention to positive stories about COVID-19, such as the experiences of people who have recovered. Do not get stuck overestimating the threat and underestimating human resilience.
- Connect over FaceTime with family and friends that you trust and whose company you enjoy

The fact you are in a fast-paced, ever-changing business. Learning ways to manage stress is critical to your health and the health of your business. Control what you can and let the rest just be.

If you need assistance managing your anxieties, contact: - Trinidad and Tobago Association of Psychologists; 868-717-4348 (8827) or visit www.psychologytt.org. The service is FREE.