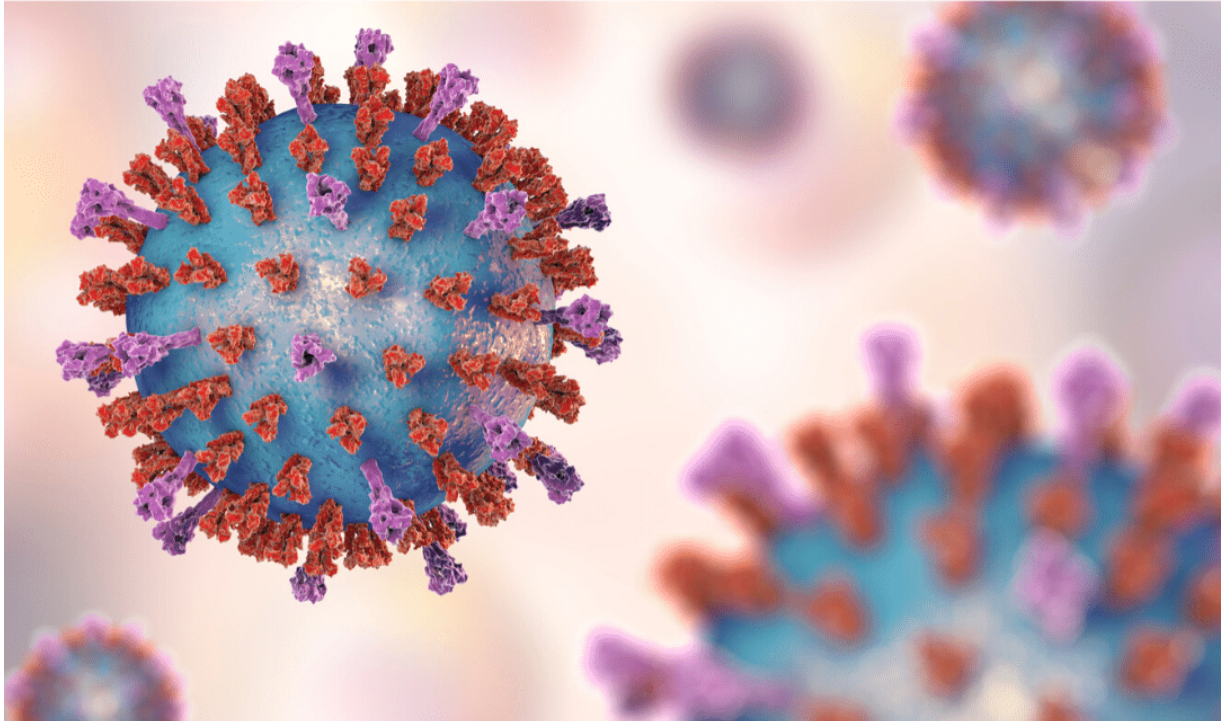


about Italy



**THE ITALIAN HOSPITALITY
INDUSTRY DEBATE
about the Covid-19 CRISIS**

©About Italy 2020

Ivrea, 21 April 2020

At the moment in which I write this paper the Coronavirus Pandemic is spreading worldwide; we are all experiencing dark times and facing a health emergency.

Uncertainty and disorientation are usual feelings, but as professionals we have to make the effort of being calm and deeply understand.

No one has miraculous solutions at today for economics and for every sector; this is valid of course also for the Tourism & Travel Sector, one of the most affected since the beginning of this epochal crisis.

By the way, **for an entrepreneur is difficult to stop and wait** and that's why I want to give some ideas and to inspire all the international tourism specialists around the world that are blocked by the shock and need to move forward, at least by now reorganizing and rescheduling their business plans.

During this Italian Lockdown (at the moment in which I write almost 6 weeks at home and still 10 days ahead) I have made a lot of Social Listening.

I am connected on different platforms with many Italian Tourism Professionals since years. During this lockdown, and even more in these last days in which in Italy we are finally flattening the curve and speaking of the "post Covid-19" actions, Italian Tourism professionals have been very active in brainstorming.

I mean hoteliers, tour operators, editors...**people "working" in Tourism**, not people involved in Institutional decisions or working in ministries.

I have listened, read, participated to online events...with the idea of giving my Clients and my international audiences a good coverage of "what's going on next", so that **they can get inspired** and take actions in their own tourism businesses.

I present you here my resume of all the ideas and projects for the Italian Tourism Sector Renaissance "post Covid-19".

Alessandro

ITALY AS A PIONEER, AGAINST OUR WISHES ...

As you all know, Italy has been the first Western Country to face the virus; Italy can be a reference for other Countries in many aspects of this emergency, since we are a couple of weeks ahead.

After more than 5 weeks of national lockdown, incremental cases and deaths are flattening, indicating that our public Health System, our politics and our population are successfully reducing transmission. **It has been hard**; we were not prepared, and we quickly organized to face this problem. Our Health System faced the emergency and reacted in an excellent way: the Northern part of our Country has been more affected, but we preserved Rome and the South.

We are approaching the Phase2 of the pandemic: returning to a sort of normality even if there's not a vaccine yet and the virus potentially is still around. **That's the moment in which we all brainstorm about the re-opening of every Sector and many ideas are coming out.**

AN EYE ON CHINA TOURISM AND THEIR TRAVEL INDUSTRY RECOVERY

An important reference for Italy is China. China is the Country where everything started and seeing how people are reacting in the re-opening can be useful for everyone.

China's recovery will be closely watched by travel industry players worldwide for lessons on how to move past a business disruption of this magnitude.

By now, travel business players in China are only aware that a return to pre-crisis norm is not yet on the horizon, as people's movement across the country still comes under significant restrictions. Large tour groups for both inbound and outbound travel are still currently banned by the central government, while travel agents are barred from running cross-province trips.

At the moment Chinese Tourism is still hibernated and will develop soon only for domestic tourists, but as the Bespoke Travel Company founder Sarah Keenlyside said to Skift:

"This crisis is really forcing us to be creative, and that is never a bad thing"

MAIN TOPICS OF DISCUSSION AMONG ITALIAN TOURISM AND TRAVEL PROFESSIONALS

What Italian industry experts are thinking about in these lockdown times:

the latest Italian industry trend lines and insights in the COVID-19 tourist era.

With Industry experts we mean hotels managers and employees, travel agencies, tourism fairs organizations, tourist guides, tour operators and so on.

The end (?) of the overtourism phenomenon

Italy has many art cities that were facing the problem of **overtourism** during last years. In the internal Italian debate this was surely a topic to solve somehow.



Venezia, Roma, Firenze but also many other medium art cities were literally **unlivable** due to the thousands of tourists from all over the world visiting them each year. Most recent forms of hospitality (see Airbnb) dramatically contributed to transform the social and urban structure of many Italian destinations.

In many occasions, during Fairs or seminars or on sector publishing, Italian tourism professionals and politicians were discussing to find a solution to Ponte Vecchio or Piazza San

Marco crowded with tourists...but no one could imagine that a pandemic could force the end of all of that. At least for a while.

The challenge is to be able to manage overtourism when all of this will be over and probably it will appear again! (I am personally convinced that this Pandemic will not change us permanently, after the emergency things will be as before - too many interests are behind - but **it could be the occasion to introduce some positive changes**).

We will visit Venezia, Firenze and Roma again, but in a different manner.

- **News from Firenze:**

Firenze and Tuscany are working on a **Renaissance 2.020** program that includes:

1. **Retrain the excellence of Italian Hospitality:** that means firstly to limit tourist apartment rentals and imposing them taxes and sanification methods as for hotels
2. Control online platforms' offers of local experiences and **select only official tours** and services (see the plethora of Chianti tours with own car, homemade cooking lessons done from everyone ...)
3. Limit snack eating in the streets with a **tax on the takeaways**
4. Insert a **closed number and a ticket to visit historical centers** (as an entrance in a museum) – lower price if tourists sleep in the center of the town
5. Imposing to large groups to visit the cities in **low-mid seasons** to avoid crowds
6. Launch of a big communication campaign of this New Renaissance, with new rules and new reputation to attract and manage tourists all over the year and with an eye on social distancing and space distance. **A new Tuscany**, in the post Covid-19 era, slower and different

As you can see, this forced stop (and the rethinking of the way tourists will have to behave in the next future) is the occasion to solve older problems. I don't know if this will happen, but it's a good and positive incentive to improve things.

- **News from Venezia:**

from Venetians professionals I have heard the idea of **visiting main squares only with previous booking**, because the access will be limited. The image of Piazza San Marco crowded with

tourists and groups...will be far from what will be possible! **People counters** will be active at the entrance of main Piazzas and this could be applied all over Italy too.

Venice is at the moment experiencing a sort of unreal situation: **normality!**

Venetians inhabitants (that slowly decreased in last 20 years, arriving to the actual 53000) are in last month living in their city without being a minority.

A curious thing: I have read that, unexpectedly and fortunately, the Carnival that partially took place in Venice this year (it was underway during the first cases of Coronavirus in Italy and it was very shocking for all of us to hear that it was suspended in late February) did not cause an epidemic outbreak. **Locals say that is because of the humid microclimate of the lagoon!**

Undertourism and minor Italian destinations

Overtourism will temporary disappear and **undertourism** will emerge definitely.

Undertourism is a tourism caring about people, about tourists. More attention on health, cultural enrichment, environment, healthy food. It will be a new approach to tourism (sustainable tourism).



Next future tourist will be more interested in discovering the **Italian healthy lifestyle**, learning from local communities and coming back home enriched. So, it will be the turn of gastronomical tourism, root tourism, wellness, detox, inspirational tourism, transformational tourism etc.

In that sense the tourist post Covid-19 is perfect for **Italian minor destinations**, where lifestyles are still very authentic, and environment and territory are preserved by not invasive forms of social life.

In Italy most of our traditions and main part of our Immaterial Heritage are preserved exactly in minor destinations and in areas barely affected by the economic aspects of tourism.

It will be the turn of small and medium Italian destinations: villages, rural areas, provincial towns, thermal resorts.



Italian Hotels post Covid-19 reorganisation:

The **World Health Organization** (WHO) has recently identified some Operational considerations for COVID-19 management in the accommodation sector (apps.who.int/hotels).

Following these guidelines, the Italian hoteliers are brainstorming about some items (in Italy there are 33'000 hotels and most of them do not belong to hotel chains, many are family owned):

- probably **direct bookings** will be finally more used than OTA. Dealing directly with the hotels will allow **more secure and flexible bookings**, with reimbursements and vouchers in case of cancellations. Hotels will add more services for the same rates, the possibility of upgrading and more flexible smart hospitality supplies
- tourists and tourism professionals will prefer hotels with more **guarantee on sanitary certifications** of rooms and common spaces
- hotel restaurants and food services will change deeply: breakfasts, lunches and dinners could not be served anymore with gorgeous buffets but will be probably always served at the table or best in room, to limit the closeness among clients. A **"certified" Room Service**, with strict hygienic measures in meal preparation, could be yet included in the room rate
- concerning hotel restaurants, it will be encouraged the **show cooking**, to transmit tranquility on the hygienic measures adopted by the hotel. Probably also more packaged food will be used. **Organic and local ingredients** will make the difference in the Menus
- due to a bigger attention to hygienic measures, also in Italy finally **cash money would slowly disappear** (in Italy is still very common and, as you surely have experienced yourself in the past, some shops don't accept credit cards!)
- the **check-in** could be modified and simplified (as yet happens in some hotels) in a quick identification of the Client without giving him the room keys. In the phase of booking a QR-code would be assigned to the Client, to access the room but also to pay all the services during his stay. That is not usual in Italy at the moment
- additional services as SPA, swimming pools, fitness rooms etc. could be shifted always more inside the hotel room. **Everything should be more private, more exclusive**
- **high technology** will be pushed in every step of the hotel experience: domotics, smart tv, robotics, hotel 5.0

Curiosities:

- Sardegna is preparing to be a Covid free island

Due to its insular nature, Sardegna has been poorly touched by the epidemic.

Moreover, the island promptly used the lockdown to minimize the number of people affected, successfully.

That's why Sardinia is preparing to be the first Covid free Italian region and the governor Solinas is yet thinking about next tourist season. Sardinia has some **very remote and rural areas**, rich of local traditions, that have been preserved during the years. A culture that is unique and differs from mainland Italy.

Sardegna has wonderful beaches and some very touristic small towns, but in the complex is very savage and perfect for social distancing vacations.



- Italian seaside tourism

With its 7'456 kms of seaside, Italy has a very important seaside tourism too.

Puglia is one of the Regions that has yet provided solutions to save the 2020 Summer season.

In this picture you can see a **preliminary test** to ensure a safe beach time: delimiting each sun lounger with 10 m² in the area of the parasol.



POSSIBLE SCENARIOS of TOURISM AND TRAVEL INDUSTRY RECOVERY

In the internal debate, Italian tourism professionals are also imagining how tourists will travel again:

- probably during the first months after the end of each lockdown, every Country will do **domestic tourism** (and a lot of “**Staycation**” intending for that staying at home and visiting around home for half a day or the day)
- it is very likely that more addicted travelers will dare to travel as soon as that will be possible, and they will travel:
 1. in most **safe and reliable Countries**
 2. **luxé tourism** will be the first to restart
 3. people will initially travel in **mini groups** (families or friends aggregates), best if self-guided



THOUGHTS ON GROUP TRAVEL

Group travel will be possible only in small groups (families or friends aggregates), probably self-guided but possibly with a **certified and trusted guide**.

The tours will have **high selected suppliers**: **boutique hotels** with just a few rooms, **family restaurants** with only a few tables or **exclusive one-on-one visits** with artisans and producers.

Tour operators will have to seek out lesser-known roads that are more remote and less populous, resulting in vacations that feel less overwhelming as we gradually pass from social distancing to normal life.

TIPS for ITALIAN SPECIALISTS:

If you are an Italian Specialist Tour Operator (or Italy is one of your best sellers since years) ...**don't panic** and consider the followings:

- Italy has demonstrated efficiency in outbreak. It gives the idea of a safe Country; **the Brand "Italy" has enhanced** some aspects that were dubious due to some old stereotypes. For example, Italian politics and governments have never given an idea of stability, but in this case our politicians shown their strength – helped by the high moral figure of our President Sergio Mattarella. Italian hospitals and Health System were suspiciously considered by international tourists due to some old ideas while in this emergency Italy showed that its health system is one of the best of the world (and is public)
- especially at the beginning of the tourism re-birth, move your attention and offer from city arts (sense of overcrowding) to minor destinations (Italy is full of those!) – **ask us about our Webinars Series "Beyond the Basics" and "The Hidden Gems"**
- it will be **mandatory** to carefully choose your on-ground suppliers (hotels Covid-free or very attentive to that, usually smaller hotels, less clients, private transfer cars instead of trains or buses) – **ask us a help! We can support you in operate safe Italy with our deep knowledge of local tourism suppliers**
- avoid high season and **attract your Clients in Italy during less crowded months** – focus on January/February 2021, reasonably the first spot time to travel again to Italy – **ask us for our Webinar "Rediscover Italy 2021- January&February"**
- we know that you must entertain your Clients about Italy even now that they cannot travel, and for long weeks ahead. Probably your Clients will be able and ready to travel in Italy in 2021. Start working on minor Italian destinations and **build a communication** around that - **ask us infos on our Consultancy Packages** (Italy Beyond the Basics Pack, The Hidden Gems Pack or ask for a Custom Pack)



I know, we are in **hibernation** now - certainly as travel consumers, but also as professionals. Regardless of our role within the travel ecosystem, the focus of our “work from home” efforts can be used to:

- Managing the blackout moment with a **continuous, positive communication** with your Clients about Italy. Maintain that dream in their minds, for a long time, perhaps for months
- Looking forward to being ready, when international travel will be safe again, we all hope very soon, to **offer the suitable Italian destinations**

This is the perfect time to take online courses to become an **Italian Destination Specialist** or **improve** your knowledge and expertise with latest trends from Italian Tourism Industry

Take advantage of this period to educate yourself with us!

We have plenty of Webinars about Italian touristic destinations and specific programs to improve your Tours Portfolio

Learn Now. Travel Later

Visit our website: aboutitaly.com

Educational trips will be not possible for a while and also visiting international Tourism fairs will be probably challenging in next months

Online tourist education, in which we believe **since ever** as a complementary tool for tourism professionals, is the perfect solution for this period