

April 9, 2020

## **Member Update: COVID-19 (coronavirus)**

Dear Members,

We are living through a public health and economic crisis, the likes of which the world has never seen. When we first heard of the novel coronavirus months ago now, I don't think anyone could have predicted how devastating its impact would be.

In an effort to contain the spread of COVID-19, we have witnessed federal and provincial authorities implement unprecedented measures – from closing international borders, to introducing mandatory social distancing, to legislating the closure of entire business sectors.

These measures have delivered the economy, and the global tourism industry, a devastating blow. In Whistler, we have witnessed the progression of businesses shutting down systematically, beginning with the closure of Whistler Blackcomb, followed by retail, restaurants, municipal recreation facilities, hotels, and even parks.

At Tourism Whistler, despite it going against our very nature as a destination marketing organization, we have asked our visitors to stay home. Now is not the time for travel. We must all do our part now, and follow the directives of our health authorities, so that we can get through these challenging times as quickly as possible. As a result, we anticipate current occupancy in the resort is at approximately 1% - an unprecedented and historic low.

The past two weeks have been particularly challenging for Tourism Whistler. Our organization relies on two primary funding streams – Member Assessments, and Municipal Regional District Tax (MRDT) collected from tourists on the sale of short-term accommodation in the resort. Because tourism is currently suspended, we have seen our MRDT funding reduce dramatically. As a result, we have made significant cuts to our organization budgets, and temporarily reduced our workforce by nearly 60%. Budget cuts and layoffs within our organization focused on the areas we could not impact in the short-term, including Visitor Servicing, Travel Trade, Travel Media, Advertising and Conference Services.

However, these remaining funds are currently being invested into short-term necessary response efforts, allowing us to preserve our Member Assessment funds to invest into future recovery and rebound efforts once the situation with COVID-19 subsides. Rest assured your Member Assessment fees will be invested responsibly on your behalf into initiatives that will set our destination up for success in the future when the time for tourism returns.

Tourism Whistler's remaining essential services team, most of whom are working reduced schedules, are focused on the following areas:

### **Research**

The Tourism Whistler Research department will continue to ensure we are looking at resort performance, forecasting, industry trends, new opportunities and best practices. Research inquiries can be directed to Drew Dodman at [ddodman@tourismwhistler.com](mailto:ddodman@tourismwhistler.com).

### **Communications**

Corporate and Member communications efforts will continue to focus on keeping our membership, media and customers informed with current and accurate information and updates. Communications inquiries can be directed to Lauren Everest at [leverest@tourismwhistler.com](mailto:leverest@tourismwhistler.com).

### **Social Media & Web**

Members of our marketing department will continue to share inspiring content through Tourism Whistler's owned channels (website & social media) to ensure our followers remain engaged and Whistler remains top of mind for future travel when the time is right. Marketing inquiries can be directed to Kirsten Homeniuk at [khomeniuk@tourismwhistler.com](mailto:khomeniuk@tourismwhistler.com).

### **Conference Sales**

While continuing to field cancellation requests, the Conference Sales team is working diligently to rebook meeting groups for future timeframes, and has successfully done so for dates in fall 2020, as well as 2021, 2022 and beyond. Meeting and group business inquiries can be directed to Karen Goodwin at [kgoodwin@tourismwhistler.com](mailto:kgoodwin@tourismwhistler.com).

### **Whistler.com**

Whistler.com Central Reservations is working with a significantly reduced team, who continue to field cancellation requests from leisure travellers, but are also working to rebook these reservations for later dates where possible. The team has also been fielding a small number of new reservations for future dates, offering a glimmer of hope in these challenging times. Whistler.com inquiries can be directed to Tory Kargl at [tory@whistler.com](mailto:tory@whistler.com).

### **Whistler Golf Club**

The Whistler Golf Club would typically be hiring approximately 100 seasonal staff at this time to operate the golf course over the summer season. However, all recruiting efforts have been suspended, and management has been redeployed to assist with maintenance work to ensure the course turf is protected and properly cared for during the spring melt. Whistler Golf Club inquiries can be directed to Alan Kristmanson at [alan@whistlergolf.com](mailto:alan@whistlergolf.com).

### **Administration**

Our administrative departments, including Finance, IT and Human Resources, are continuing to provide the essential services our organization requires to remain in operation. Inquiries regarding these areas and all others can be directed to me at [bfisher@tourismwhistler.com](mailto:bfisher@tourismwhistler.com).

Albeit at a reduced capacity, Tourism Whistler remains here to support you. We continue to work diligently with our resort and industry partners, planning coordinated government advocacy efforts and emergency response measures. We are also working closely with our industry partners to develop a business recovery strategy, which will be executed when the time is right.

In the meantime, we remain committed to keeping you informed and look forward to more buoyant times ahead when we can welcome all of our guests back to Whistler.

Sincerely,



Barrett Fisher, President & CEO, Tourism Whistler