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Vaccines for all tourism, travel and hospitality frontliners

June 14, 2021 @ 7:00pm



One of the health officer on duty on the Kuala Pilah mobile vaccination centre (PPV) in Felda Kepis. -NSTP/AZRUL EDHAM MOHD AMINUDDIN

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LETTER: We welcome the Tourism, Arts & Culture Ministry's (MOTAC) recent media statement reiterating its commitment to collaborate with the Science, Technology and Innovation Ministry (MOSTI) to prioritise the vaccination of frontliners from Malaysia's tourism sector who are working during the Movement Control Order (MCO) 3.0.

While we appreciate the ministry's efforts to champion the needs of the approximately 3.6 million people who are employed in the travel, tourism and hospitality industry in Malaysia, we are cognisant of the fact that for this to have any effect on the industry's recovery, all frontliners across all sectors in tourism, hospitality and travel need to be vaccinated, and not just those who are serving during MCO 3.0.

With the pandemic continuing to show little sign of abating amidst a resurgence in some states and tight border restrictions remaining in place, vaccination plays a hugely significant role in ensuring the recovery of the sector which had contributed an average of RM80 million annually to Malaysia's economy during the pre-pandemic years.

NYO sees the blanket administration of vaccines for all industry
<https://www.nst.com.my/opinion/letters/2021/06/698707/vaccines-all-tourism-travel-and-hospitality-frontliners>

VACCINE



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OYO sees the blanket administration of vaccines for all industry frontliners, and not just those operating in businesses earmarked as essential services during MCO3.0, as equally essential to the industry's survival and recovery.

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For this to happen, we need the support of the entire tourism, travel and hospitality industry. OYO stands in solidarity with everyone in the industry and has launched a campaign on Change.org to call for the urgent vaccination of all frontliners in the travel, tourism and hospitality industry in Malaysia.

A delayed vaccination programme for tourism, travel and hospitality frontliners will not only threaten the industry's survivability, but also impact the livelihoods of everyone employed in it, especially in states which are heavily reliant on tourism as a key economic contributor.

Publicly available data indicate that hotels in Malaysia lose an estimated RM300 million for every two weeks the MCO is in force. Major airlines in Malaysia, namely Malaysia Airlines Bhd, AirAsia Group Bhd, its long-haul affiliate AirAsia X Bhd and Malindo Airways Sdn Bhd have also shed thousands of jobs after grounding most of their planes following the MCO in March to preserve cash flow. Others continue to survive but at the expense of furloughs, layoffs and debt restructuring.

While subsidies, grants and loan moratoriums are defibrillation mechanisms needed by an industry surviving by the skin of its teeth, the reality is that the sooner we prioritise the vaccination of all frontliners in the tourism, travel and hospitality industry, the faster the sector can recover. We can learn from countries that have prioritised the vaccination of frontliners in tourism, travel and hospitality to see the impact it has made on the industry.

In Seychelles, for example, an immunisation campaign was launched at the end of January for the islands, with the aim of vaccinating the majority of the population by mid-March and reopening to tourism. In fact, the growth recorded from January to date is 1.39 per cent, despite the fact that the archipelago is already open to vaccinated travellers.

Greece too has organised its own vaccination campaign to help the sector, with their government focusing on the minor islands, isolated places where the virus has spread little, immediately starting the vaccination of the local population in order to immunise the area and give hope to summer tourism.

The announcement of the programme was made public a few days ago, and perhaps it is still too early to assess its impact; at the moment, the variation in searches for flights to Greece is +1.02 per cent.

The same can and must be done in Malaysia. As more people are vaccinated and a safer environment is created for everyone, I believe that consumer confidence to travel again will increase significantly and help the recovery of the travel and tourism sector still coming to terms with the



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continued effects of the pandemic.

TAN MING LUK

Vice-President & Head, Malaysia & Singapore,


OYO

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