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Meaningful Travel, Health & Safety and The Future of Insurance: 3 Key Insights From the UK Buyer Market in 2020



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While none of us can read the future, we've all heard numerous predictions on what post-COVID-life could look like for the travel industry. But while our crystal balls are under construction, we're sticking to the facts – so we called on Cookson Adventures' Tom Hutton to report from the ground. Here's a quick skim on the insights he's gleaned on UK mindsets since the first seeds of recovery have started to appear...

1. PEOPLE STILL WANT TO TRAVEL, BUT THE WAY THEY BUY TRAVEL HAS CHANGED SIGNIFICANTLY.

First up, the good news: the UK wants to travel. "It's safe to say people still want amazing travel products – we've operated three significant trips since COVID began, and even booked a trip for 2023," Tom revealed. "But the way people buy travel and expect trips to be operated has changed dramatically." Some UK clients are risk-averse, opting for staycations in Wales and the British coast where they can retain a sense of control, while others are more cavalier, but people are still keen to travel internationally – no matter how badly a country has

been affected. While border restrictions may prevent clients visiting selected international destinations this summer, the intent to travel is as powerful as it ever was.

Tom also noted a growing trend towards more purposeful travel. "People are considering their travel more – perhaps doing it less but more meaningfully, tying in cultural and educational elements, particularly if they're family trips." Much has been made of the predicted shift to remote destinations, and the same holds true for Tom: "From superyachts to private islands and remote US ranches, the private hire market has seen a real surge." For hotels not in this bracket, he suggested buyers and suppliers work together to mirror this 'safe haven' feel in their properties.

2. ALL LEVELS OF THE SUPPLY CHAIN MUST WORK TOGETHER TO ALLAY BRITISH CLIENTS' SAFETY FEARS.

It might not be the sexiest subject, but health and safety has never weighed so heavy on our minds. And for good reason: as Tom explained, it's critical UK clients feel confident to travel – "it's front and centre of their minds," he urged. "They want to know exactly what is being done and is in place to mitigate COVID risks in the environment they are going to." While such mundane matters would have once been the last thing on travellers' minds, our new world now requires commitment and preparation from all levels of the supply chain. "As a buyer, we now expect thorough risk assessments from suppliers – and we can work with you to bring in our own expertise," he offered.

3. TRAVEL INSURANCE MUST EVOLVE TO KEEP UP WITH INDUSTRY DEMANDS.

Another industry beleaguered by COVID-19, insurance has suffered serious image problems in the last few months – with flight cancellations and inflexible terms making unwelcome headlines. "One of the most significant things that has changed is insurance – we're seeing some refusals to underwrite holidays due to COVID," reported Tom. This more conservative approach from travel insurance companies is potentially problematic for buyers or travel agents, who, Tom predicted, may in the future require UK

travellers to be fully insured before booking. However, the liability imposed on operators and agents by the current legislation in the event of an imposed cancellation cannot be solely borne by them. "This may mean the insurance model will have to evolve – the British public have been burnt since COVID," he expanded. "Insurers must accept that they will have to cover circumstances like pandemics, as UK clients will likely be unwilling to travel without them where they would put their money at risk. We would also hope to see suppliers and DMCs adopt a more flexible approach to their terms, sharing the burden with the agent or operator should a circumstance like this arise again."