



'The world is learning every day'

Adam Goldstein discusses the cruise industry's path to recovery

Sydney, July 22, 2020:

CLIA's Global Chair Adam Goldstein has provided an update to Australian and New Zealand media on the work being done internationally in response to COVID-19 and the pathway towards a resumption of cruise operations. In an online round-table discussion with travel trade writers and travel editors, Mr Goldstein explained how cruise lines are developing extensive health measures to uphold the safety of guests worldwide.

He began by explaining CLIA's engagement with the Australian and New Zealand governments behind the scenes.

"With respect to Australia and New Zealand, the thing I want to underline the most in case any of you are wondering about this, is we are absolutely engaged as CLIA, as the industry, with the authorities in both countries. I want to put to rest any possible concerns that there isn't dialogue going on."

He explained the possibilities for a staged resumption of cruising worldwide, and how this might work in Australia and New Zealand when the time is right.

"What we guess we will see, and not only in Australia and New Zealand, but in almost all parts of the world, is some type of phased-in sequential resumption. In fact, probably most of you are aware that this is about to start in Germany where home ports working with the local and national authorities – and taking guidance from the EU in the form of the healthy gateways suggested protocols – are going to start cruises from Germany, returning to Germany, not visiting any ports in between, for citizens of Germany, Switzerland and Austria.

"When it comes to Australia and New Zealand, of course we will respect the interests and wishes and requirements of the authorities, but certainly we believe that some type of sequential restart of that sort should be viable, should be in the dialogue. Particularly, given the geographies and coastlines and available or reachable cities and towns and communities along the Australian and New Zealand coasts. And then we're very aware there's been dialogue between Australia and New Zealand that may at some point lead to a travel bubble, and possibly at some point cruising would be included in that approach. We don't know that yet, but that's certainly a possibility."

Mr Goldstein said the health and wellbeing of guests, crew and communities would be the most important consideration, and that medical experts worldwide were helping the industry to learn from COVID-19.

“The priority at all times is the health and welfare of the guests and of the crew. We simply must adopt a public health protocol that is appropriate to the challenges that the pandemic presents to us in your part of the world and every part of the world. And that's what we will endeavour to do.

“We all continue to learn, everybody does. How we think about the virus, how we intend to address the virus here in July, is radically different than it was in May, which in turn was radically different than it was in March. So we need to take from what we know of the past. We need to take from what we know of the virus and we need to craft with the help of numerous experts, epidemiologists, infectious disease experts, and all kinds of other medical experts who are helping us along the path of understanding.”

He explained the global approach to creating worldwide health protocols in response to COVID-19, including the work being done by individual cruise lines, the experts in medicine and epidemiology who are assisting them, and the role played by CLIA in translating that work into industry-wide measures.

“Our mission today as the association is to support all of those processes to the best of our abilities and continue to work with all the other member lines who are engaged in their own efforts and in collective efforts of different types of lines to figure out how to address the pandemic.

“We hope to start to see significant results of those efforts around, more or less, the end of next month and to early September. And clearly, those efforts and those findings will inform the view of authorities and cruise lines all over the world, but in the end, each country has its own regulator or regulators and each country will make its own decisions about what cruise restart conditions should be.”

Mr Goldstein highlighted the enormous economic cost of the worldwide cruise suspension and its impact on businesses including travel agents, tour operators and cruise industry suppliers.

“We understand that the economic ecosystem of cruising is really hurting. It's hurting in Australia, where hundreds and possibly soon, thousands of jobs will be lost due to the inactivity of cruising. Australia is a \$5 billion a year cruise market, where already we expect that about \$1.4 billion has probably been forgone this year and that's in the run up to the normal cruise season taking place.

“One of the realities of our industry is that people naturally think of the bigger companies because the big cruise companies are highly, highly visible. But our economic ecosystem is almost entirely consisting of small and medium size enterprises; travel agents, tour operators, suppliers of all kinds, small destination communities and so forth. Our advocacy is targeted to achieving as much relief from the various governmental authorities as we possibly can achieve because when we do resume, we need our ecosystem to be there for us. We can't sell cruises without travel agents. We can't deliver itineraries without communities, and so on.”

He explained the four pillars that support the cruise industry's efforts to uphold the safety of guests and create a pathway towards resumption.

“There are four pillars to how to get to restart and beyond. One is the screening process. Everything to do with the ultimate decision of who is allowed to come onboard and who is not allowed to come onboard.

“The second pillar is the onboard operations during the course of the cruise. How do we achieve the appropriate amount of physical distancing? What is going on with food service, mask wearing, testing, temperature taking and all the other things? What happens outside on the outer decks? What happens in the dining rooms? What happens in the theatres and around the ship?

“The third pillar would be ways in which cruising eventually restarts visiting destinations, making sure the guests, crew and the people in those communities stay safe.

“And the fourth pillar would be, when there is evidence of COVID or COVID-like symptoms, that everybody knows what to do, who to test, quarantine, isolate, remove from the ship, whatever the case may be. And that the execution between destination and cruise line is accomplished as flawlessly as possible under difficult circumstances.”

Mr Goldstein was asked whether the industry was confident it could properly respond to any suspected COVID-19 cases in the future.

Yes, this is a terrifically challenging environment. Not only we, but the world is learning every day, every week, every month, much more about the virus and how to combat it. It's incredibly challenging. Yet we have a lot of assets that we bring to bear in our industry. We have tremendous control over the environment of the ship. We have dedicated professionals who are experts in sanitisation. We have a long history of keeping the ships clean and keeping the guests healthy. We have wonderful destination relationships in almost all cases.

“Yes, we will devise what I believe to be the appropriate protocols. Yes, we will work assiduously with the destinations to not only understand what we're each expected to do in the event somebody presents either as confirmed for COVID or presents COVID like symptoms. But what we need to do is we need to stress test those relationships and make sure that people will do what they committed to do beforehand when they need to do it.”

He also addressed the negative publicity cruising has received, particularly around events in Australia.

“Obviously we understand even 14 times zones away that the situation in Australia has been particularly difficult. Mind you, it hasn't been easy in the United States either. But first of all, of course we regret as people and as companies the sickness and the fatalities connected to that.

“We can only move forward. We only endeavour to do the right things. We need to come up with a strong public health program to combat the spread of the virus and then we need to execute against that.

“Cruising has been remarkably successful in Australia and New Zealand in recent times. This was an extraordinary development that happened. We hope to never experience anything like that again in your market.

“Nobody wanted to experience the bush fires either, but that tragedy gave rise to the ability of the cruise lines to show what they could do to be good community citizens. Now, I think the way we need to show that we are good community citizens is by our public health performance and that's what we will endeavour to do. And hopefully as that goes on, the tonality of both the media coverage and the public official pronouncements will gravitate towards back to where they were not so long ago.”

Mr Goldstein acknowledged the difficulties ahead and warned that cruising would not restart “at the snap of a finger”. But he spoke optimistically about the industry’s ability to confront its current challenges.

“There's an incredible amount going on behind the scenes all over the world, including in your part of the world, and we look forward to resuming for the benefit of the guests, the crew, the shareholders of the companies, all the companies and the communities that we visit. The cruise industry is a \$150 billion a year global enterprise and it basically isn't happening right now, and we're going to try to do something about that to the best of our abilities.”