Hello and welcome to a very special edition of the Wheeler Institute COVID-19 webinar series. We have with us, for the next hour, none other than Tony Wheeler, the co-founder of the Lonely Planet publication series, with his wife Maureen. Tony and Maureen also funded, very generously, the Wheeler Institute for Business and Development, which many of you know, focuses on the impact of business among those in developing and emerging markets in disadvantaged communities.

Those of you who are regular followers of our webinar series, you also know that for the last couple of months, or a little earlier, as the COVID pandemic has hit the world, one of the many things that the Wheeler Institute has done, in addition to funding research on the topic and beyond, in addition to convening people together, on Zoom and many other platforms, in addition to rethinking our approach to education especially experiential education in developing countries, in addition to all of that, we’ve been running this series of webinars as part of this. Today, Tony will be joined by George Looker. George is a brand new graduate of the London Business School, MBA 2020. Tony had graduated from London Business School in 1972, so a different generation of-
George Looker: 03:07

Tony, before we focus on the core of today's conversation, I also want to echo some of what Rajesh said and said thank you, not only for your time today, but also, yours and your wife's generosity and vision for the institute. Certainly, it's been timely with all the support that it's been providing during the pandemic and it's been amazing for me, to be a project officer and play a part in the series of fascinating conversations that the institute has been able to run throughout the last few months. It's been a privilege to have a ringside seat for those conversations between economists and entrepreneurs and humanitarians and academics and various commentators. I know that's only a small part of what the institute does, but on behalf of students at the school, I just wanted to say thank you as well.

Tony Wheeler: 03:54

Well, thank you. What can I say?

George Looker: 03:58

Tony, we've been in lockdown in the UK for just over 100 days and we're hopefully about to reemerge into the world. I know you're in Australia at the moment, but where were you when lockdown measures started to be put in place and how have you, a legendary world traveler, coped with having to stay in one place for such a prolonged period of time? What have you missed the most during lockdown and where do you think you're going to go once you're able to travel freely again?

Tony Wheeler: 04:26

Well, you said 100 days, and I actually just looked and I've been back in Australia for 105 days, so that was pretty
much as the ordeal hit the fan. I was actually in Yemen when all this started to go seriously wrong. I was on the island of Socotra, which is ... It's part of Yemen, but it's the south of the main part of Yemen in the Indian Ocean. It's been described as the Galapagos of the Indian Ocean.

Tony Wheeler: 05:03  I was there for a week long stay and suddenly we got this message that ... Excuse me ... we had to evacuate, we had to fly back to Cairo because the world was about to shut down, which is essentially what I did. I flew back to Cairo, I flew on the next day to Australia, and I arrived here in time to be self-quarantined, self-isolated for 14 days. I couldn't go home. If I'd gone home, I would've pushed Maureen into self-isolation as well, so I ended up in an Airbnb for 14 days, but if I arrived just a few days later, it would not have been a case of self-isolating, it would've been a case of being seized by the government and put in quarantine and shut down and the door locked, and you're not allowed out.

Tony Wheeler: 05:56  So in a way, I was here at a luckier time, but yeah, I've been here now for 105 days and I'm getting very itchy feet. This is not normal at all. I've got to say, I have seen ... One of the things we're talking about when we do start to travel, we will travel more locally at first. If you're in London, that's going to mean travel in Britain, or travel with Britain and Ireland, or traveling around Europe. You're not going to be thinking about going to, certainly not to South America, certainly not to North America, the way the United States is going, certainly not to Asia and Australia.

Tony Wheeler: 06:37  So the travel is going to be local at first, and essentially that's what I've been doing. I have been doing a little bit of travel, but within Australia, and even not very far in Australia because we're having a bit of a second wave here in Victoria and Melbourne and as a result, we're
virtually not allowed out of Victoria. We can go to Sydney, we can't go to the Barrier Reef, to Queensland, South Australia, Tasmania, the Red Center. That's all just shut off. So it's a strange, strange time.

George Looker: 07:11
That's interesting, you're talking about doing more local, domestic travel, and I was reading something earlier in the week. Brian Chesky, the CEO and co-founder of Airbnb, he said that travel, as we know it, is over and it isn't coming back. I mean, do you agree with him? What do you think? I mean, domestically, or internationally, do you think the experience will be ... How different will the experience be for travelers that are just looking to, either go on a relaxing holiday, or want to see the world as a family? What do you think is going to change most significantly about the experience?

Tony Wheeler: 07:47
I half agree with him because whatever ... I mean, travel will come back, there's no question of that. We can look at all sorts of times in the past, after 911, when for a spell, terrorism shut travel down. We've totally forgotten that in Britain, there was the mad cow disease phase which really shut down travel in Britain. At that time, I was involved with Youth Hostel Association and lot of youth hostels around Britain were shut down because you couldn't go out into the country, so we forget ... We don't forget, we know that there have been other occasions when travel has been badly hit and it came back.

Tony Wheeler: 08:29
This is a bigger hit, there's no question this is a bigger hit in all sorts of ways. I think when it comes back, it's not going to just jump back to suddenly we're going everywhere and Easy Jet are in full operation and Emirates are flying you all over the world. That's not going to happen, that's going to be different. I think one of the things we have to look at is ... I think wasn't it Churchill who said that, "There's no crisis, you don't get some
mileage out of,” and we should look at some of the improvements we can make in travel. I think there’s no question that we did, to some extent, over-travel. There was the whole over-tourism thing.

Remarkably, a week or two before I was in Socotra, I was in Japan at an over-tourism conference and that’s a problem. We have totally solved the over-tourism problem. Nobody is worrying right now about over-tourism. They aren’t sitting around in Barcelona and saying, “Oh my God, there’s so many people walking down Las Ramblas.” That is absolutely not happening. When we do get back to travel, maybe that’s one of the things we’re going to look at a little bit more seriously.

George Looker: We'll go back to over-tourism because I think, as you say, it's a really interesting trend that I know that you were focusing on before coronavirus hit and also seeing kind of some of the impacts. But, seeing as we've got so many participants on the call today, I'd like to get a bit of a sense of when the audience thinks that their own travel patterns will resume? If we could bring up the poll, it will ask, when do you think you will return to the level of travel that you had before the pandemic? This summer, once governments are able to agree on air bridges and we're allowed to travel again?

George Looker: Or, do you think it'll be next year, 2021? Do you think it'll be 2022, perhaps once we have a vaccine, and some of the concerns about travel have been eased? Do you think it'll be another time in the future, or do you think you're never going to return back to the level of travel that you had prior to this crisis? Do you think that this is going to be a permanent change in your travel patterns?

Tony Wheeler: I put my submission in there. Oh, look at that, I'm with the majority. We're all thinking 2021, but you know, that last
line, never, there's a certain amount of truth in that because we are never going to get back to the way it was before the pandemic. There's going to be all sorts of changes that are here with us forever. That's pretty much the same thing ... After 911, the security stuff that came in, it's been there ever since. We expect now to be looking at the liquids we put in the bags. We expect to be going through the x-ray machines. We expect to be thinking, "Do I need to take my belt off? Are my shoes okay?" Those things are now ... They're here, we're not going to change them.

Tony Wheeler: 11:33

It'll be the same thing after this. There'll be lots of things, that we don't even know yet what they really are. I suspect we're going to be asked to prove our health before we get on the flight. When the vaccinations come in, they're going to be saying, "Okay, where's your vaccination certificate?" Right now, they're going to taking your temperature. There's going to be minor things and later on, major things that will be here forever.

George Looker: 11:58

Yeah, that's really interesting and some of those changes, I'm interested ... You obviously have a lot of experience working with people within the sector, whether it may be hotel operators, or running restaurants and other sorts of ... airlines and aspects of the travel value chain. Now that we're in this phase of gradual reopening and obviously our business school audience thinks that by 2021, just over half of us will be returning to our typical travel patterns, what do you think that the sector needs to do, from a managerial and a business perspective, to adapt to what the consumers will want? Is there going to have to be ... What are you urging people who own or manage hotels and restaurants and other elements of this value chain, to be focusing on so that they're able to bring customers through their doors again?
Well, I think, obviously, they're going to be impressing us with how much hand sanitizer they have and how well the room is cleaned. There's been a lot of talk about we're never going to see the minibar again because ... We shouldn't anyway because it's a waste of money. But, the minibar, who knows whose hands have been in that handling the bottles or feeling the chocolate bars before they take them out? We're never going to see the buffet breakfast again because they were things where people went and they pushed things around and picked them up and thought about them and breathed over them. There's going to be lots of changes that, at least, in the short to medium term, that change forever, the hotel breakfast buffet being a really good example.

So I think that the operators are going to have to convince people that it's okay. We're running these experiments. I look every day and we've had experiments. Sweden and Brazil, both ran experiments which the results have not been very good. Right now, Europe and the European Union is running an experiment, we can all go out there and ... Well, not everybody but those who are the leaders in this going out there, and probably in months' time are going to decide, "Well, it wasn't that bad. We went there, we spent some time, we came back, we haven't got the virus. Everything's okay." [inaudible 00:14:19] small or quite large in some ways.

All around the world, in the last few weeks, there've been lots of protests over the Black Lives Matter question. Here in Australia, we had two big ones, one in Sydney and one in Melbourne. They're now three weeks ago and nothing has really popped up. There was a lot of talk like, "Yeah, you shouldn't go there, you shouldn't do it, and if you do go, all hell is going to break loose." And basically, all hell has not broken loose. We are running these experiments all the time. I think a lot of people are going to have a lot
of fun looking at the figures later on and working out what worked and what didn’t work.

George Looker: 14:57  
Yeah. In terms of some of these experiments, you’re talking about, either run by local administrators or national governments, or perhaps kind of multilateral bodies, what measures would you like to see the government put in place to support the travel industry? My fear, for example, is that we see small independent hotels and smaller challenger airlines going out of business, replaced by ever-larger global chains and national carriers. I’m worried that, that post-coronavirus world has limited choice for consumers and price increases, which really worsen the customer experience.

Tony Wheeler: 15:35  
Yeah, I agree, I 100% agree. One of the things that’s being said is that when travel comes back and we start to be able to travel again, it’s going to be people who can afford it. If there are less flights and they have to be less crowded, the prices are going to go up. And if there’s more isolation and not so many hotel rooms are going to be open, it’ll be more expensive and I don’t want to see that. It’s okay for me, I can afford it, personally, but I want to see young people still able to travel. I don’t want to see them locked out because they can’t afford the price tag.

Tony Wheeler: 16:20  
I think there’s going to be lots of things ... Things will come [inaudible 00:16:24]. One sector of travel which has been really hit by the corona virus and as you know, and we’re looking at how is it going to come back, and it’s also been taking on a huge amount of blame for it, has been the whole cruise ship business. I think the cruise ship business ... I’m not a ... Some places you go to ... If you want to go to Antarctica or the Arctic, you go on a cruise ship, a small one perhaps, but nevertheless, you go on a ship. But the huge ones, they haven’t appealed to me, but they do appeal to a lot of people and I won’t knock that.
I think there was a lot of bad side of the cruise industry, and the fuel they use, the way take advantage of tax breaks and flags of convenience. In the Caribbean, "If you keep the costs down, we'll go to your island, if you don't, we'll cross you off and go somewhere else." I think the cruise ship business, they did have a multitude of sins, and I think that they're going to have to come back as cleaner operation before we really like them again.

What do you think about opportunities, especially with everyone having a bigger focus, hopefully, on climate change and decarbonization, opportunities for increased, perhaps, rail travel or you're talking about domestic travel. Will people be able to change their habits, the way that they travel in a way that reduces their kind of carbon footprint?

George, I think you're 100% correct there. We've gone on for years about, "The carbon emissions go up and up and up and what could we do about it? We can't do a thing." And then suddenly, we can turn the world upside down and every flight in the world, virtually, is shut down. We discovered we can do. It's not very comfortable, what we had to do, but we could do it. I think when travel comes back ... There certainly was a certain amount of travel that was, in many ways, unnecessary. We don't need to be going off every weekend for a booze-up with the boys on the other side of Europe. That isn't really necessary. If you want to get drunk, you can get drunk just down the road. We don't need to go to Prague to do it, so I think that there's going to be some changes and there not all bad changes. I think some of them are going to be good things.

We are going to pay more attention to our local environment and certainly, at first, there's going to be more local travel. I think that's going to be the first thing
Tony Wheeler: 19:37 But we're not seeing what's going on in the outside world. I've had contact to various places where suddenly all the international tourists have dried up. And if you're in a business where your business was 90%, or 100% international tourists, suddenly having no tourists at all, is just a huge blow. I really feel for those countries where that has just hit them like a sledge hammer.

George Looker: 20:08 Yeah, and obviously, the focus of the Institute is to looking at developing markets and frontier economies, so I think it's a really critical thing that we talk about and think about. What do you think tourism looks like in parts of the world where, perhaps, the access to infrastructure and access to because facilities is limited? For example, I was in Myanmar, just before lockdown struck London Business School, actually, on one of the global experiences. It's a beautiful country, some wonderful hotels and a growing tourism industry but the worry is that COVID-19 will be a permanent setback for places like this.

Tony Wheeler: 20:48 I think it'll be ... Well, no question, right now it's a huge setback, it's a 100% setback right now, but I don't think it's going to be a permanent setback, and I think there's going to be ... There'll be people who think, "Oh, ..." I mean, I went to Myanmar when it was Burma still, many years ago when it was empty. There just weren't any tourists there at all, when the standards were ... There were an
awful lot of mosquitoes in your room and the electricity only worked sporadically. A lot of the comforts that we developed later on were not there. Then, I saw it grow and grow and now it’s …

Tony Wheeler: 21:26

For the pandemic crisis, it was one of those countries worrying about over-tourism and now it’s going to be back the other way. I mean, how people will think, “Well, this is the opportunity to go.” I just got an email from a friend of mine who lives in Phnom Penh, in Cambodia. He sent me a bunch of photographs of empty Angkor Wat. He said, “God, if you had the opportunity to go to Angkor Wat, now is the time to go there. There’s no crowds at all. You’ve got the place to yourself.” So I think there will be a certain amount of that, as things start to reopen. There will be people thinking, “Wow, I can go Venice when the cruise ships aren’t coming in, obscuring the view of all the wonderful churches.”

George Looker: 22:12

Where’s top of your list to go, once these places reopen?

Tony Wheeler: 22:17

Well, I look first of all where I didn’t go this year because after I got back from my trip to Yemen, I was going to South America. I was going basically to two countries I’ve not been to before, Uruguay and Paraguay, and remarkably, those two countries have been two that have done very … They’ve not been hit by the virus as bad as other places and I’ve … You’ve got to hand it to Uruguay, they border with Brazil, here’s one of the worst places in the world, and Uruguay seems to have just escaped from it. Are they a little non-island New Zealand? Have they done all the right things?

Tony Wheeler: 22:58

I don’t know, but Uruguay and Paraguay was the first place I didn’t go to, so I’d like to get back to those two places. I’ve still got my ticket, I’m still ticketed to fly there. I can reinvigorate the ticket if flights start again. The other
three places, later this year, I was planning the first of September to meet a bunch of friends, including a couple of LBS graduates in Athens to do a trip around the Greek Islands. Well, right now it's crazy because if you're coming from Britain, you cannot go to Greece. Now, I can go to Greece. For Australians, the Greeks say that's okay, but I can't leave Australia, so we've got half of my group can't go there, and the other half can't leave the country to go there. So Greece is totally crossed off at the moment.

George Looker: 23:57 Yeah, it does seem difficult to plan these trips that are supposed to be happening right now and getting people coming from all corners of the world will be a challenge, I'm sure.

Tony Wheeler: 24:05 It will be, absolutely.

George Looker: 24:08 I think because we've got the sort of ... we're talking to a business school community, I guess, also be interested to hear your thoughts about business travel, and any kind of permanent changes that you think will happen, obviously, whether it's going to be replaced by video conferencing. As a former consultant, I was very familiar with airport hotels and flying in every Monday and Thursday to various clients. What do you think that impact of more working from home will be? Again, not necessarily our own personal habits, but for the tourism and the travel sector at large because that's quite a [crosstalk 00:24:46].

Tony Wheeler: 24:47 That's a really relevant point, George and I think there's a bunch of questions. One of course is we will get more ... We have got more used to working from home and we're all adept at Zoom meetings and so on. I actually went to a board meeting last week, the first one they'd had since it all started in the office where there was nobody else there. Everybody else was working from home, and the CEO of this company was saying, "Yeah, yeah, this has worked
fairly well. We've got through it fairly well." But it's not like being in the office and kicking ideas around and meeting face-to-face. It's a poor substitute, so I think in that respect, we will want to get back to real life, to actually living with people and getting on with them.

Tony Wheeler: 25:36

On the other hand, there is going to be a certain amount of people saying, "Well, lots of things I could do from home." I mean, I think there's a wider perspective of that. You think, it used to be that home was a convenient Tube ride from the office, and now we think, "Well, I could live miles out in the country where the cost of a house is cheaper, I could get more real estate for my money. Why do I need to live close to the office? I can ..." This may be a total upheaval, not just in the sort of business and office things, but in the real estate and real life things. The travel thing, obviously, the airlines I worried that all their business travelers are going to disappear because they're not flying from place to place.

Tony Wheeler: 26:22

On the other hand, there's going to be an incentive, "I'd rather be up in the sharp end of the aircraft and have more separation from people than jostling elbows back in economy." Maybe that's going to sort of push people into the more expensive seats, if they can afford them. I think there's going to be lots of changes that we really don't see as of yet, what they are, but they're going to be there longer term.

George Looker: 26:48

I think you're right and I think a lot of people are highly conscious of the fact that ... Even walking around on the streets ... I don't know what it's like in Melbourne, but in London, where our personal space is protected, and airports are one of those places where you sacrifice an element of your personal space and I don't know whether that trade off, whether we'll be able to strike a balance in the near future.
Tony Wheeler: Yeah. Another thing that I think is going to happen is that we've had this recent situation in recent years where you're going ... all the digital businesses, they're all operating out of Dublin, they're avoiding taxes, which is much the same as the cruise ship companies and flags of convenience, avoiding taxes. And airlines, they get their fuel, they don't pay tax on fuel the way that other businesses do.

Tony Wheeler: I just wonder when we come out of this, the other side and government's really need that, they're going to short of money. They've been pushing money out to keep the economies afloat and they're not going to be so happy about the digital businesses who they allowed to set up in Dublin and avoid tax in all the rest of the European Union, by paying a pittance to Dublin. I think there's going to be lots of things like that, where suddenly we're looking at things with a little more seriousness.

George Looker: In terms of those government interventions, I think it's a really important one. I mean, let's maybe go back to what we were talking about with developing economies as well and thinking about ... I was reading about Kenya, for example, but obviously it's hugely reliant on tourists coming to safaris and going to that part of the world and spending their money in order to fund education projects, healthcare projects, all sorts of other side benefits from tourism in parts of the world like that. What do you think we should be doing, as people that look at the travel industry across the world, to make sure that money is going to the right places, to those that need it, to make sure that all of the supporting infrastructure, and all the
masks that are being fed through tourism, end up still being supported?

Tony Wheeler: 29:20

I think you're totally correct on that one as well. We do need to go back and I've seen this in too many places. After the huge earthquake in Nepal, which devastated that country, there was a push, very ... not immediately, because everyone thinking, "Oh, Katmandu has fallen down. All the hotels won't be there, and trekking routes are closed." But there was a push after a while to say, "Go back. We went you to come." From the Nepalese, "We want you to come back and bring your money back to us." Similarly, a lot of people thought that, "This is something I should be doing."

Tony Wheeler: 30:03

I think that is going to be a situation in a year or two, where ... Right now, in Europe, people are thinking, "Can I go on holiday to Spain, or Greece, or France," or whatever? I think a little bit further down the line, we're going to be thinking, "We should get back to these other countries as well because previously, our tourism business has supported them and they need it." I think African countries are a good example.

George Looker: 30:30

Yeah. Okay, I think we're getting towards the end of our conversation but I'll leave you with a final question which is, do you have any hopes? What would you sort of like to see as the long-term positive impact of ... This crisis has obviously been incredibly painful around the world, but is there anything that you see as your kind of main positive outcome?

Tony Wheeler: 30:55

I guess, I do hope we do think of the world in a wider sense, that we realize that our particular situation, we may personally be suffering or other people we know close to us and businesses we're associated with," but we're a wider world, and we have to think of that as well. This has
really hit the world in a wider sense. I really think we've been, in many ways, insulated from it because we haven't out there seeing what the situation is in the ... We're cut off at the moment. When flights aren't going and people aren't coming back and saying, "I saw this, I saw that," we just don't know what's going on effectively. I really hope we do reach out to the wider world when the doors reopen.

George Looker: 31:48
Absolutely, no, I think that's true and certainly, the work that the Institute does and also through London Business School, all the different global business experiences, hopefully that can all restart very quickly because I think it's a very valuable part of [crosstalk 00:32:04] my education, my MBA program, but everyone's around the world.

Tony Wheeler: 32:08
It's very important and I think that's what I've ... It's been the reason I liked the whole concept of the Wheeler Institute, that it isn't just looking at the developed world, it's looking at the wider world and my business was always the wider world and I don't want to forget that.

George Looker: 32:28
Right. I think I'll pass you back to Rajesh now. Thank you, Tony.

Rajesh Chandy: 32:34
Thank you, George. We will see you shortly. Tony, while George has been asking you questions, I have been scrolling through the list of questions we've been receiving and there've been quite a few. I'm going to group some of these questions because I detect some themes in quite a few questions and that's wonderful. First question, Tony, is around what I would call the democratization of travel and if we're going back to a past, if the future is more like the past, where it was the wealthy who could afford to travel beyond their local areas, it was the wealthy who could have their hands held
or things planned before then, to maneuver through various rules and regulations and have basically and organized package kind of a tour that allowed them ...

Rajesh Chandy: 33:36

Of course, your huge contribution to the world was to democratize travel, to allow the independent traveler to discover the world, often distant parts of the world for themselves. The question, part of which is summarized by Catherine Armstrong who says, "Regarding travel becoming more expensive, which is something you touched on, it's not just younger people who will not be able to afford travel, it's about the risk that only the very wealthy, top percentage of people, mostly white, are the ones who get to travel and get the benefits of travel, some of which you were alluding to in your conversation with George. Are we risking another layer of ingrained privilege?"

Tony Wheeler: 34:22

Yeah, we definitely are. I think that's something we've touched on and I'm glad that Catherine brought up that idea that it isn't just necessarily the ... We think of young penniless backpackers, but you don't have to be young to be traveling on a tighter budget. Yeah, that really does worry me, that travel may revert to being something for the privileged and the well off. We don't know where this is all going to go. I really like the quote that, "It's very hard to make predictions, especially about the future," because that is the situation. We are looking at projections about the future and we don't know where this is all going to go to. I don't want to see travel locked down just to a certain specific group.

Tony Wheeler: 35:23

There's nothing wrong with ... I've been talking with someone recently about Bhutan, and Bhutan's approach to travel and that they kept over-tourism away, but essentially, by making it more expensive. Bhutan is noted for all its Aman Resorts and I've stayed in the odd Aman
Resort, I've met Adrian Zecha who started Aman's, interesting guy. But I don't want to see the world reduced to Aman Resorts. I don't want to see Bhutan reduced to Aman Resorts. So yeah, it does seriously worry me that when travel comes back, it may just be for the wealthy, but the other thing is, the penniless are often the most intrepid.

Tony Wheeler: 36:15 One of the things I've suggested ... 100 days ago when I was about to go into lockdown, I said, "Are there going to be some people who don't go into lockdown, who just escape from it, who go somewhere and right now are sort of sneaking across borders, despite the fact that they're supposed to be shut out of these places, and are going from place to place?" And there's going to be interesting travel books, interesting accounts in a couple of years' time or five years' time of, "What I did during the pandemic lockdown. How I went to places where there were no tourists at all, because everybody was locked out, except the intrepid few like me." If those people are out there, I have great admiration for them. They've disobeyed the laws when they were told to go home and shutdown and lock the doors. They ignored it, and they went out and they survived great.

Rajesh Chandy: 37:17 When you had emailed, I don't know, about two or three months ago, to say you'd just been in Socotra and you were quarantining in Melbourne after you got back, I must say, this is has been a dream destination of ours, my wife and myself, for a long time. But then, there were people who were stuck in Socotra, when you managed to get out. Of course there have been some worse issues there, so I suspect there will be books written, or at least Instagram blogs, Instagram series done about ...

Tony Wheeler: 37:53 Oh, there will be, there absolutely will be. I'm intrigued to see what comes out of this whole thing because all sorts
of things will come out of it. We don't know yet what the story's going to be.

Rajesh Chandy: 38:06

Exactly. Well, there are some nudges from the audience about the potential kinds of things that could come out, because we talked about two types of individuals, either those who are wealthy in money, or those who are wealthy in time. But a lot of people are time poor, and therefore cannot be those intrepid travelers who take a drive down to Yemen and then take a ferry to Socotra. There are also money poor as well as, or at least not as well off as well as time poor. Are we likely to see the return of travel agents, do you think?

Tony Wheeler: 38:51

Well, I've got to say that Socotra trip, I have to hand out kudos to my own travel agent and I had booked that trip through a travel agent. Look, I'm someone who sometimes I do things through Skyscanner, I book my flights that way. Sometimes I go directly to the airline and sometimes I do this, sometimes I do that. But on that occasion, I had to actually book the flights through, not my particular trip to Socotra, that was a totally separate one. But to Cairo and from Cairo back to Australia, was done with a travel agent and suddenly everything was thrown up in the air and as I arrived from Socotra back into Cairo, I sent a text message to my travel agent, as the flight was taxiing in to the terminal in Cairo. I said, "I'm back in Cairo two days earlier than I expected, everything has gone totally head over heels, I've got to get out of Cairo before all the flights shut down."

Tony Wheeler: 40:03

And before I got to immigration, my travel agent had changed my flight, had got me a seat and it was organized. I was highly impressed. I didn't know what I was going to do and I was pretty sure I'd get out within a day or two. It wasn't going to be the end of the world, but this travel agent had sorted it out. I thought, "If you
needed an ad for why travel agents are good things, this was it." They'd come through like ... I was fortunate as well, that 1:00 AM in Cairo, it was working hours back in Australia. If it'd been the other way around, I would've had to wait for another 10 hours till they got to the office but I did this when the office was open and they came through, like a good travel agent would. So if you want to advertise for travel agents, I'm doing it right now.

Rajesh Chandy: Now, there are several questions, Tony, about well, two topics, one around something you touched on, the environmental impact of tourism, sustainable tourism is one. The other around the rule of government because suddenly we're all caged in, the government is back in a big way, in many parts of the world and of course, this is a giant, depending on how you count it, you measure it, anywhere from close to four trillion to eight or $10 trillion a year industry, involving hundreds of millions of people around the world, the tourism industry and its offshoots.

Rajesh Chandy: The government, as you mentioned, especially in certain countries that are extremely reliant on tourism, the governments have been actively involved. Two questions, first around ... This is from Jon [inaudible 00:41:58], another wonderful entrepreneur in the travel and tourism industry. Jon asks, the big issue is accounting for the natural, social and health externality, therefore, the after effects of travel and tourism and avoiding subsidies, that have enabled some of these businesses to thrive sometimes at the expense of the locations that are tourism spots. If you had to organize a subsidy policy on the part of government, that ensures that the help gets to the individuals on the ground and as you said, was disadvantaged, how do you do that?

Tony Wheeler: I think, Rajesh, that's a very, very relevant question. One of the places where I'm seeing that right now ... I've been in
some discussions with people in New Zealand. When the pandemic crisis hit, New Zealand was another of those places like Venice, like Barcelona, like Amsterdam, that was really worried about over-tourism. They were concerned that there was really just too much tourism and that it was so much looked at in an international version, that, "There was too much of this, too much of that. Could the country which had really sold itself as being a place that has a natural environment and does a lot of natural and nature things very well, was it being overwhelmed by the joys of tourism and the money that tourism brought in?"

Tony Wheeler: 43:41

One of the concerns that they're having there right now is that they're trying to say, "What going to happen when the doors reopen, and who's going to decide what happens?" Well, the obvious people are Tourism New Zealand, they're the New Zealand tourist office, and suddenly all these Tourism New Zealand people are all twiddling their thumbs and dying to get back to work and earning some money. But their whole concept has been bringing in the international tourists. Tourism New Zealand have virtually nothing to do with local tourism. It was all the international side. There are people who have this concern about New Zealand being over-touristed and the place being totally overrun by international tourists at the expense of ... Any country ... Not any country, but most countries, a lot of tourism is local.

Tony Wheeler: 44:36

If you go out to around Britain, a lot of the people you see walking in the Lake District or doing bicycle trips or going to the theater ... I often say, you got to the theater in London, at intermission, there's a bunch of people who get up and leave because they've come from overseas. Part of their thing about going to the theater is, "I'm in Britain, I have to go to the theater in the West End. Right, it's intermission, I've done it, I can leave now." [crosstalk
00:45:04] Yeah, they've done that, they've done that side of it. The people who... If you did analyze the audience before intermission and after intermission, there'd be a much bigger international contingent before intermission than afterwards. Not right now, of course, there's no theater.

Tony Wheeler: 45:26

But the same problem's there in New Zealand, and the New Zealanders who are worries about over-tourism and was it doing the right thing, are a little bit worried that it's going to be Tourism New Zealand, the organization that's only thinking about bringing in the international tourists, who set the goals and the guidelines for tourism after the pandemic. So yeah, we do need to look at this really carefully.

Rajesh Chandy: 45:52

If you could link that... There's an invitation to you, as well as a comment from Jean Pierre [inaudible 00:46:02], who lives in Uruguay and he [inaudible 00:46:06] you to eat some chivitos. He says, "How do you imagine governments from emerging markets, where standards are not as controlled? How can they manage," and actually, relatedly, by the way, entrepreneurs, what can they do differently?

Tony Wheeler: 46:28

They're obviously going to have to pitch to get their tourists back because in so many places, the tourists have totally gone and if you're in a country where... In a way, places like England have it easier because you've seen people flocking to the beach in Bournemouth. If they can't go to Spain or the Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur, or to Italy, or Greece, they're going to go to Bournemouth. As I say, a lot of tourism is local and you can get those tourists back. But if you're in a country, I think probably Kenya... You mentioned Kenya... is a good example where so much of that safari tourism and wildlife tourism and walking tourism, and beach tourism and so on, is
international, then you've been hit much more ... You've got a much harder hill to walk back up afterwards.

Rajesh Chandy: 47:25

On that point, about local, of course nothing is as local as your own armchair and behind me are Lonely Planet books that Larissa and I look through and fantasize about places like Socotra. Mark Edwards, who writes from the very lovely but empty beaches in Majorca, says, "What is the future of travel books? With the information so accessible now, is it about bringing the local people and their stories to life through photography and video?"

Tony Wheeler: 47:59

I think that's another very relevant question. I'm not involved with Lonely Planet anymore, but I do sort of ... I keep an ear out for what they're doing and of course, they have been very badly hit. If people aren't getting on flights to fly places, well, first of all, the airbus aren't building the aircraft for them to get onto the flights to fly places. Secondly, they're not buying the guidebooks to use when they go there. I know Lonely Planet are thinking, "What good, at the moment, is it updating a guidebook?" Because you don't even know which hotels are going to survive and still be in operation afterwards. They're going to be taking a bet that this one is going to come back and that one may not. Guidebooks are definitely hit.

Tony Wheeler: 48:45

Look, guidebooks, it's nother of those businesses that was in all sorts of transition before this hit, and this has just accelerated the process. I think people are still going to want information. I mean, I'm a great believer in information and I use the internet as much as anybody else. It isn't the only thing I use, I use lots of other information as well, and certainly when I went to Socotra ... Well, there was no internet there, so we could not look up things and say, "What's the Trip Advisor recommendation for where we go tonight," because the internet did nada.
It was there in a very, very slow fashion. It was best to get up at 4:00 AM if you wanted to get online at all. But, no, it wasn't there so there, having a guidebook, it was either, in my case, download it, or in print, was much more valuable. Forget the internet, it wasn't there. That's very nice, I mean, I do like to go to places where we don't have that immediate international connection.

Tony, we're coming to the end of our conversation. Just a question from our newly formed travel society at London Business School, which is actually a very nice way of, perhaps, summarizing some of the conversation, if you had to list ... If we could put you on the spot and say what are, now, given everything you're observing, the big top trends? If I'm an entrepreneur, if I'm an observer of the industry, what are the big top trends in the new world of travel? What would you say?

I think there's going to be a lot more travel of trying to do things on your own, where you're ... I've always been a keen cyclist, I've done some bicycle riding across countries in Africa and a little bit in Europe and other places. I like ... I've been on my bicycle today, so my bicycle legs are still aching from ride this morning. But I think we could find that bicycle riding ... There you are, you're out by yourself, you're totally safe, you're going to places that are not overrun by tourism, which ... I just read a wonderful account by a Lonely Planet author of last year, she spent three months riding from London to Istanbul. I read her account and I thought, "Wow, that sounds ..." That's saying if I was young enough and fit enough to do it, I'd like to have been chasing you down those roads."

I think things like that will come back and they may be a very good thing to look for, a business angle that may
work well. There’s lots of elements of do-it-yourself travel, you might call it. There have been car trips. We talk about the road trip coming back, that we want to do more road trips. That may well be a thing. Hertz has gone bankrupt, maybe they’ll come back next year, because if the U.S. sorts out their coronavirus problem and people decide, "Well, now is the time to do that road trip across the U.S." And if not, there’s lots of road trips in Europe that sound like they could be good fun.

Rajesh Chandy: 52:07

Wonderful. That’s perfectly on time. It’s time to bring back George and I will note ... First of all, thank you so very much, Tony. As always, fun, fascinating, wonderful sorts of insights and anecdotes. Thank you. I expect Socotra will feature on people’s travel lists, among other places, and Uruguay for that matter. A couple of notes. I was remiss, I omitted something really important when I did the original introduction of George. I omitted to mention that if you go to the Wheeler Institute COVID-19 pages, you’ll see 20-odd video interviews, much like this one hour long, with some of the leading thinkers in the world on important topics, that have to do with the consequences of the pandemic with a particular emphasis on a topic, I know you mentioned as well that’s dear to your heart, around developing countries and some of the disadvantaged populations living there.

Rajesh Chandy: 53:17

Now, if you go there, and if you don’t have an hour to watch the recording, you will benefit from reading the very short summaries, wonderfully written summaries of each of these webinars that George has spent this summer until he joins Amazon. He has been spending much of his time as a project officer of the Wheeler Institute writing those, watching us maneuver our way through webinars and summarizing the insights that these experts have provided. George, thank you very much for doing that. Over to you.
Thank you, Rajesh. It’s been really interesting, the last few months. As I said, really at the cutting edge of thinking and analysis about how the world can cope with this pandemic and as you say, that focus on emerging and developing markets, that’s so important and critical for how business can support those economies as well. I think that links to the conversation that we’ve had, that was wide ranging but hopefully optimistic, I think. Disappointing that Tony thinks that we’ve got the death now for the hotel buffet, but I think it’s … I think the clear message is that there’s still definitely …

While there might not be appetite for your full English breakfast, it’s going to be appetite for travel to resume and a confidence that we need to have perhaps more or greater awareness about the environmental and human impact of travel and thinking about some of these themes that you’re obviously really close to and passionate about, Tony, with regards to overcrowding and over-tourism. But, fundamentally, travel and being able to see the world, is really important for human curiosity as well various economies around the world. I think, that’s a very clear message that came from the conversation and with your really interesting answers that you gave to our questions today, Tony, so thank you.

Thank you.

As always, such a delight. Normally summer is when … I know that the summer is arriving in London when tony and Maureen Wheeler arrive in London from Australia on their migration journey, but it’s a delight to see you, if nothing else, late in the evening. Thank you for joining us in this very unique moment.

Rajesh, George, thank you very much.