



Nay Harn beach at Phuket, Thailand. Part of Thailand's plan to re-ignite the decimated Phuket economy is to quickly vaccinate the local island population, with the hope that once "herd immunity" is achieved, they can open up to vaccinated tourists.

Conclusions

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As might be expected, any publication on public health that takes place during the COVID-19 pandemic is inevitably going to be linked to the current crisis. Even those places that have not experienced large numbers of cases, hospitalizations, and fatalities have still suffered turmoil. This is especially so for small islands. Although many islands have been relatively successful at protecting their populations from the virus, they have all suffered the economic and social consequences of an epidemic during this modern era of globalization. For a variety of reasons, this is particularly problematic for small islands.

First, as is clear to most, it is not uncommon for islands to have a greater revenue and employment dependency on international tourism. Over the past year, and in almost every jurisdiction, international travel has declined precipitously. Given the

viral incubator role that cruise ships were perceived to have played in the early stages of this pandemic, those islands with a greater reliance on this form of tourism have been even more adversely affected. If tourism itself may be slow to recover, then cruise ship tourism will undoubtedly be even slower to bounce back to previous levels (Nhamo et al., 2020).

Even those places that did not have a large tourism presence have suffered. The decrease in mobility has affected those jurisdictions that have traditionally relied upon remittances as an important part of community and household income. For example, the World Bank (2020) estimates that remittances will fall by approximately 20% in 2020. Migrant workers, and by extension their families and community economies, “may be among the hardest hit groups” (Takenaka et al., 2020, para. 1). It is difficult to send money back home if temporary migrant workers, health care professionals, or caregivers are not even allowed to travel to their employment destinations. Although some islands may not have experienced a steep decline in remittance revenues, others have suffered to a greater extent (Connell, 2021).

THE LEVEL OF POVERTY HAS increased in many islands in the Pacific. Food insecurity, a feature that was already a health challenge for many islanders, has become even more severe. Ironically, the pandemic has made more transparent how the prevailing import-dependent and monoculture food export system has created greater vulnerability for small islands.

The economic crisis has also created a parallel social crisis. The impact of any pandemic inevitably hurts those already vulnerable, including those in unstable employment, women and other marginalized groups, and those in rural areas or outlying islands (Connell, 2021). With already weakened social protection systems, the economic decline has increased the level of poverty in many islands in the Pacific

(Edwards, 2020). Food insecurity, a feature that was already a health challenge for many islanders, has become even more severe. Ironically, the pandemic has made more transparent how the prevailing import-dependent and monoculture food export system has created greater vulnerability for small islands (Leweniqila & Vunibola, 2020). Not only has this been a major contributor to non-communicable diseases associated with obesity, but it has also revealed the susceptibility of the food supply chain to external shocks (Murphy et al., 2020).

One of the prevailing themes of recent research on island development is their adaptability and nimbleness; being able to react quickly to changing circumstances. For those islands that are especially dependent on international tourism, the pandemic has forced them to adopt alternative strategies to assist this sector, in the process creating a greener and more sustainable future (Ioannides & Gyimóthy, 2020). In some cases, islands have marketed themselves to “digital nomads” as part of a wider “Work from Everywhere” trend (Buhalis, 2022). While these footloose workers, characterized

as young, professional, and motivated by broader quality-of-life considerations, existed before the current pandemic (Woldoff & Litchfield, 2021), islands such as Bali, Indonesia, and Phuket, Thailand, are now explicitly branding themselves as destinations for this class of worker (Cook, 2020; Orel, 2020). It is too early to assess the success of this strategy. It is clearly not going to attract large numbers of tourists. However, that may be the point. It becomes one of a series of strategies that, collectively, may diversify the tourism base in a more sustainable manner.

Some island governments and tour operators in places such as Cuba have attempted to surgically host groups of tourists on offshore islands, thereby restricting their contact with the host population (Rizzo, 2020). St. Kitts and Nevis in the Caribbean have implemented a strict regimen of testing prior to and after arrival on the islands, with tourists moving from initial isolation at their hotel complex to free movement throughout the islands over a period of 14 days. In Phuket, Thailand's plan for the resumption of tourism is to quickly purchase and vaccinate most of the local island population, with the hope that once "herd immunity" is reached, they can more quickly open up to vaccinated tourists (Thanthong-Knight, 2021).

The COVID-19 pandemic has revealed opportunities to strengthen food systems, including greater intra-regional trade and ecologically sound practices in traditionally import-dependent islands in the Pacific and Caribbean (Farrell et al., 2020; Murphy et al., 2020). While the pandemic has brought about increased land disputes and a reduction in agricultural production and planting materials, it has also resulted in a re-emergence of cultural safety networks such as barter systems, and a reinvigoration of traditional food systems (Iese et al., 2021). As the subtitle in an article by Miles (2020) suggests, "If we get food right, we get everything right." A more self-sufficient food system has the added benefit of being more nutritious, supporting small scale producers and rural/outlying islands.

For many islands, a new economic normal is going to be accompanied by increased reliance on aid to meet the cost of COVID-19 mitigation efforts, either bilaterally or through multilateral agencies such as the World Bank, regional development banks, and the International Monetary Fund (Herr, 2020). Despite increased aid, the current economic dilemma has even longer-term consequences for deficits and debt loads, increasing the likelihood of social services cutbacks through structural adjustment or even to the possibility of debt defaults (Rashid et al., 2020).

Even in a post-COVID-19 world, governance may matter. For example, even as vaccinations are distributed to parts of the developing world, a pattern seems to be emerging wherein subnational island jurisdictions (SNIJs), such as those that are part

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of the British Overseas Territories, are accessing vaccines faster than their neighbouring independent island states, in much the same way that some SNIJs were able to access recovery funds after hurricanes or tsunamis. There are some who say that, despite all of the aspirational talk of “building forward better” or the “new normal”, our post-pandemic world may be much like the old normal, with decisions on island futures being made elsewhere (Herr, 2020).

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