Brazilian Accommodations: The Search for Leisure Amid the Pandemic of COVID-19

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This paper proposes an approach based on the observation of the Brazilian way of conducting the pandemic of COVID-19 in relation to the commercial openings proposed by the state governments and the way how accommodations dealt with the pandemic in the year of 2020. The pandemic generated by the new coronavirus has put the world in front of a reality that reveals the true face of countries’ adaptation to the difficulties and the capacity of each place to solve conflicts. Economy was weakened and people’s mobility became limited. In this context, the tourist activity was one of the first to present instabilities, because, as it is an economic activity where one of the characteristics is the displacement of people, the activity was affected in all sectors that are linked to tourism. The hospitality “industry” needed to reinvent itself to think how to restart or continue activities safely, in a scenario of economic uncertainty, even without an expectation of vaccination of the population against the coronavirus until the time of conclusion of this paper, in January/2020—month that the first vaccine arrived in Brazil. However, even under a scenario of instability and health risk, people sought hospitality and leisure services in order to obtain for themselves a mental relaxation that made them escape a desolate reality and have a moment of liberation and relaxation. Although hospitality is important from an economic point of view and beneficial to the individual, the discussion becomes controversial because it analyzes the moment when people seek these services. This study will raise the question about the role of hospitality in this moment of uncertainty worldwide and will discuss some conclusions as the result of this observation.

*Keywords:* hospitality, COVID-19, leisure, tourism, pandemic, accommodations

**Introduction**

When the restrictive measures were set in the world because of the pandemic of coronavirus, tourism was one of the first sectors to present some information that showed the failure of multiple sectors that are part of it. 2020 was a year in which the economy became fragile, as the movement of people became restricted.

The movement of people characterizes the tourist activity. Since the 1990s to nowadays, tourism has been attributed to the largest movement of people in the history of mankind, with tourism being the main economic activity in many countries around the world (Dias, 2005). In this economic *boom* generated by tourism, even developing countries, like Brazil, for example, have become important emitters and recipients of tourists, in addition to being potential places for the implantation and development of large national or international hotel chains. This is a characteristic of so-called globalization.
The globalization movement can be understood as the opening of human relations facilitated by the means of communication, mainly the Internet. According to Zygmund Bauman (1999), in the world we inhabit, distance does not seem to matter much, because the dynamics of time and space are viewed in a natural way, letting people with the task of exploring the physical space and crossing borders. In a huge world to be discovered and with the facilities offered by the technology of the media and/or transportation, there is no reason to become limited; owing to this facility, the law of supply and demand is not disregarding this, because there are many people moving on, rediscovering new things and each of these people has different profiles and varied preferences. However, to satisfy individuals’ need for consumption, Bauman (1999) also affirmed that “the current industry works more and more to produce attractions and temptations” (p. 76).

Tourism, directly or indirectly, is present in this transition of people and interpersonal relationships. The preferences of tourists give them a status that they do not normally have in their daily lives. They are always moving on, in search of satisfaction. Nowadays in world, for a person accustomed to traveling, stay at home is to stop exploring the existing world and abdicate hedonism.

The hospitality, so important for tourism, is part of this context of seeking satisfaction. Hospitality and tourism are interrelated so that, if tourism is expanding, so hospitality also is. According to Pereira and Coutinho (2007):

The process of development and globalization of the world economy, in addition to generating a progressive flow of regional and international trips, has rapidly expanded the leisure and tourism sector, which has effectively become the great promoter of hotel chains. (p. 2)

Still according to Petrocchi as cited in Pereira (2003), both hospitality and tourism are dependent and become an “inseparable binomial” (p. 2). It is important to note that currently accommodations offer additional leisure and entertainment services to attract greater demand. Today, mainly in Occidental world, the mechanisms that convey entertainment do that exploring conventional aesthetic standards. Therefore, leisure and entertainment services are “built”, even implicitly, with the same purpose: consumption.

Tourism depends on other sectors for its development. Rethinking leisure in the face of tourism in times of restricted individual mobility is not easy and involves structures, such as legislation, policies, or culture. These are factors that allow or not the individual’s awareness of the problem.

The year 2020 is being marked by changes in the social environment as a result of the spread of the new coronavirus, known technically by the name COVID-19. Under the guidance of the World Health Organization (WHO), commercial establishments had, in principle, to survive the process of social distancing, the lockdown. And slowly, with the reopening of establishments, there was a need to adapt to the called “new normal”.

Accommodations had to pause to their activities on a temporary basis to avoid crowding people in the same space for fear of imminent contamination. Each Brazilian state started to determine the closing of the commerce. This research deals with an analysis of official data from the Ministry of Health, as well as data from recognized tourist agencies to analyze the movement of people and the motivation for seeking leisure in accommodations even in a period of strict health care. A qualitative research was used in different regions of the state of Rio de Janeiro to verify how the accommodations are proceeding in this period of temporary closing. The analysis allows us to understand the consumer behavior and the prognosis for tourism in Brazil. Next topic will discuss an overview of accommodation activities in Brazil.
Literature Review

Leisure Versus Risk

Touristic demands have preferences according to the type of tourism developed and the public seeking such services. Brazil registers an increase in tourist activities motivated by the sporting events that the city hosted, as the World Cup (2014, nationwide) and the Olympics (2016, concentrated in the state of Rio de Janeiro). With the growth of the tourist activities, the offer adapted to the demand to offer the due services referent to tourism, which we can highlight the hospitality as an object of this study, not forgetting the infrastructure and urban planning that are essential public instruments in the constitution of a quality tourist activities.

In accommodations, the offer is diversified, because according to these structures in touristic cities, it is possible to find hotels, inns, hostels, farm hotels, flats, bed & breakfasts; all these categories are oriented according to the economic condition of the client and also their preferences. So, the supply is only diversified because the demand is also diverse. Due to this dynamism in interests and preferences, the offer adapts itself.

The Brazilian reality allows us to observe that, although there is a lot of touristic potential to attract and maintain demand (beaches, waterfalls, rivers, peculiar cuisine, forests and natural beauty, historic cities, art, music, modern cities, and so on), there is still much what to do in relation to the organization of the accommodation structure, because cities do not always dispose an organized structure to hold visitors properly.

Each destination has characteristics, and for each preference, there are different target audiences. The profile of tourists is mostly people economically active, who have income to travel, which varies according to their economic purchasing power and how much they are willing to invest. Such people see in tourism their personal satisfaction in line with their vital needs because leisure, at the end of the 19th century, had come to be considered a need for people to replenish their work forces and a consume that generate benefits too (Barretto, 2006).

In past centuries, before to know kind of infections and how to combat infections caused by microorganisms that proliferated more intensely during the summer, it was common people from political elite to elect “summer capitals” in capitals of countries suffering from tropical diseases—such as Rio de Janeiro\(^1\)—had its one, for example, Petrópolis\(^2\). Another common thinking was the air as a producer of diseases, so tuberculosis patients went to sanatoriums in mountain towns, where the air was cleaner. Today people sick with malaria, yellow fever, tuberculosis, or tropical diseases in general have medical treatments that no longer require this migration.

Nowadays, tourism trips happen for several reasons. One motivation is the leisure. In modern capitalist society, the concept of leisure is related to the consumption of products and services, an aspect intensified by the work of the mass media that act in the propagation of ideas that associate leisure with consumption activities and not with personal development (Silva & de Araújo Miranda, 2013).

However, guests searching for leisure and entertainment in the scenario imposed by COVID-19 are looking for a form of leisure amidst an unstable panorama. The dichotomy risk of life versus need for leisure is the

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1 In the 18th century, the capital of Brazil was transferred from Salvador (state of Bahia) to Rio de Janeiro. Rio de Janeiro only ceased to be capital in 1960 with the planning and creation of the city of Brasília, under the government of President Juscelino Kubitscheck.
2 Known as the “imperial city”, Petrópolis is a city located in the mountainous region of the state of Rio de Janeiro. Due to the favorable climate and natural conditions, the Brazilian royal family, at the time of the empire, had their summer residences in this city.
problem that this paper intends to discuss and think about the consequences of this issue that divides opinions among health professionals because it is a situation in constant change and still being studied.

**Methodology**

**State Measures and Examples**

In March 2020, coronavirus pandemic began to plague Brazil and the world. From this month on, the federal, state, and municipal governments have established measures to try to contain the transmission of COVID-19 in Brazil. Many services such as public transports, schools, shopping, and tourist activities have been forced to stop their activities due to the high contagion capacity of the virus.

Provisional measure to provide financial assistance to families benefited by the federal program entitled *Bolsa Família* determined the release of a credit of R$3 billion in order to provide assistance to people who work informally and to citizens who lost their jobs during the pandemic period (Brazilian Federal Senate, 2020).

Each state in Brazil was responsible for defining how the lockdown would be conducted. An example of monitoring commercial activities is the flexibility of the sectors according to the evolution of the COVID-19 in Brazilian states. As an example, in the state of São Paulo, the most populous of Brazil, this monitoring method is done in phases, considering the number of existing cases. According to the state plan entitled *Plano São Paulo*, each phase is represented by a color, and the level of restriction is done according to the phase.

![Figure 1. Plano São Paulo and the sectors allowed to work according to the phase and evolution of coronavirus.](https://g1.globo.com/sp/sao-paulo/noticia/2020/05/27/quarentena-em-sp-e-prorrogada-com-flexibilizacao-progressiva-em-diferentes-regioes-do-estado.ghtml)

Through Figure 2, it is possible to see that, even in the month of June—the month that registered the thousandth death by COVID-19 in Brazil—19.67% of the lodging facilities in Brazil were booked. And this made accommodations to take measures and precautions regarding the protocols of safety and hygiene, as an attempt to contain the advancement of the coronavirus.

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The demand for bookings, even small, is still significant compared to countries, like Spain, for example. The discrepancy in the opening of accommodation facilities is seen in the percentages of open establishments. While Spain, until October/2020, remained with only 35% of the accommodations opened (EFE, 2020), the month of August/2020 in Brazil ended with 85% of the hotels reopened (Panrotas, 2020).

According to research carried out by the Forum of Hotel Operators in Brazil (FOHB), in 461 hotels in Brazil, in the period from January to October 2020, a variation of -50.8% was registered in comparison to the same period of occupation of the year of 2019. Table 1 shows the research done, as well as the occupancy rate.

Despite the lower rates of 2020, the accommodations only slowed down without closing their doors, because there are clients who travel for work (business profile) and these people are a target audience somehow also impacts the risk of agglomeration. As an example of measures taken, in a small survey with four accommodations in different regions of the state of Rio de Janeiro, questions were asked about the way in which each hotel dealt with the pandemic and these questions sought to understand the profile of the guest. The questions were open, as it was a qualitative approach, although some quantum data have been analyzed for comparison purposes.

Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Occupancy Rate of Hotels According to Brazilian Regions</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>BRASIL</strong> Jan a Out/20</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Região</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CO</td>
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<tr>
<td>NE</td>
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<tr>
<td>N</td>
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<tr>
<td>SE</td>
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<tr>
<td>S</td>
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<tr>
<td>Brasil</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

*Note. CO (Midwest), NE (Northwest), N (North), SE (Southwest), S (South).*
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hotel 01 City: Rio de Janeiro</th>
<th>Closing and reopening time</th>
<th>Measures taken</th>
<th>Estimated load capacity</th>
<th>Comparative with the same period of the previous year, based on a period of 30 days</th>
<th>Profile of guests/leisure options available</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| The hotel did not stop the activities | - Face protection and staff gloves  
- Alcohol gel spread throughout the hotel  
- Temperature checked of all people  
- Meals at the rooms  
- Distance from reception | No | <No answer> | - Mostly, the business profile  
- Leisure options limited to housekeeping supervision  
- Swimming pool and other leisure areas temporarily closed |
| Hotel 02 City: Angra dos Reis | 3 months closed | - Free distribution of alcohol gel 70% in all common areas  
- Double cleaning of the rooms and all common areas, face towels, bath, TV controls and air conditioning are packed after being cleaned  
- Signs informing guests of the mandatory use of a mask for guests during their stay in common areas and when serving breakfast  
- Distribution of masks, facial protectors, and aprons for employees, in addition to alcohol gel | 40% of total capacity | In 2019, during the same period (between the months of June and July, school holidays) during the week, about 60 to 80 guests were received and at weekends, 120 to 200 guests. Now in 2020 in the current period, they are receiving about 30 to 40 guests during the week and 80 at the weekend. | - Guests who were tired of staying at home and usually corporate customers  
- Swimming pools, games room and gym used with prior appointment |
| Hotel 03 City: Rio de Janeiro | There was no closure due to reservations that were already scheduled until the end of 2020 | - Acrylic protection on the reception bench  
- Gloves, and masks for employees (some already came home with their masks the same one that is used throughout the workday)  
- Alcohol gel support on the hotel floors, on the terrace, in the lobby, in the restaurant and in all hotel facilities  
- Employees have been instructed to wear masks (although some employees wear the mask under their nose, but there are few)  
- At the entrance of the hotel there is a carpet that is soaked in bleach and some floor cloths as well  
- Breakfast, for those who go down to the restaurant, almost all items are packaged (breads/cheese/ham/butter/curd) only scrambled eggs and hot dogs that do not pack  
- Guidance for guests to place their coffee orders in the room.  
- Proper cleaning in accordance with the standards (bleach and alcohol 70). | There was no information on maximum load capacity at this time of reopening or increase in occupancy, as the hotel has not closed | <No answer> | - Business profile mostly people who work on oil rigs and travel for work, but the arrival of passing guests or who make reservations is very few. Regarding the estimated quantity, the hotel has between 30 and 40 pax who work on board and have to stay in a period of 15 days or more and the number of guests passing through or with reservations does not arrive at the moment until 15 at the most 20. However, we are having sporadic events in our halls  
- Space with pool/sauna and a small gym. Pool can only attend 4 pax at a time and in the sauna as well. At the gym one at a time. However, due to the proximity to an open leisure area in the city of Rio de Janeiro (Aterro do Flamengo), many guests who can go out and exercise prefer this option |
Table 2 to be continued

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hotel 04</th>
<th>City: Saquarema</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The hotel did not stop the activities</td>
<td>- Alcohol gel for guests and staff and guests</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Protective masks for workers and guests</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- Rules of distancing in the common places of accommodation</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>There was no information on maximum load capacity</td>
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<td></td>
<td>There was a small decrease in the demand of guests in this period.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- Families looking for leisure</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- Hotel has a pool and a free area (terrace) for guests</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- Receiving people normally</td>
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In these four accommodations, it is possible to analyze that the preventive measures taken are similar, but the occupation capacity becomes subjective, because there is no a clear measure in the prevention protocols on the percentage of adequate occupation, nor is this mentioned in the global protocol of the World Travel & Tourism Council (WTTC). The business public—people who travel for work—is very frequent, as well as the family audience. The form of prevention made by accommodations gives the guest a feeling of safety and health protection, as determined in the global protocol of the WTTC. But the public that uses the accommodation for leisure reasons make us think about the collective behavior to detriment of isolation.

**Result and Discussion**

Based on this proposal, considering that the responsibility for breaking the isolation belongs to the guest/client and based on verifications in the accommodations, three hypotheses will be presented that can explain the demand for leisure through tourism in times of pandemic and instability in the world scenario.

**Hypothesis 1: Institutional Law in the First Place—No Mattering the World Panorama**

The Brazilian Constitution in existence since 1988 establishes in Article 5, Item XV that: “locomotion within the national territory in times of peace is free, and anyone, under the terms of the law, may enter, remain in or leave it with their assets”.

This right has a subjective character when it mentions “times of peace” as a caveat, because it presupposes that the only condition for confinement is a war with the use of weapons. However, the current pandemic crisis currently imposes on citizens a condition of activity restriction like other pandemic crises in world history, such as the Black Death in the 14th century or the Spanish Flu pandemic in the beginning of the 20th century. These are situations that impose restrictions and denote uncertainties about the future.

The same Constitution establishes in Article 6: “Education, health, food, work, housing, transportation, leisure, security, social security, maternity and child protection, social assistance are social rights to the helpless, in the form of this Constitution”. When leisure is understood as a necessity and a right, the citizen starts to make use of it indiscriminately, and tourism can be a form of leisure and the services that the tourist activity offers are available to those looking for them.

The world was surprised by the arrival of the COVID-19 whose contamination speed is high and one of the first economic impacts occurred in the tourism and its services, whereas it is an unstable moment, until the world’s political authorities offer an assertive solution for detecting the virus. However, for some people, the world panorama does not matter, as long as their individuality may be well. And traveling is a way of seeking well-being and personal fulfillment, which leads to the next hypothesis.

**Hypothesis 2: Denial of Reality and Desire to Escape**

This hypothesis is a complement to the first because the person who disregards the current social scenario also denies reality to himself. In normal situations, leisure through tourism represents an escape from the obligations imposed by work and an opportunity for people to leave the usual routine of their home. And for that
reason, they look for refuge in places that make them feel good. Tourists are eager for “exotic” settings and places to satisfy an existential, contemplative, leisure dimension of modern man. A necessary break with daily life, at the pace of their daily lives, to replenish their energies for a more productive return to the world of capitalist work, in general dehumanized, reified, alienated, dull and massacring (Gama, 2019).

However, when the desire to escape occurs in a social scenario whose consequences are beyond the self control and when this is reflected in statistics that point to an increase in demand, we begin to question the collective behavior in the Brazilian case. When considering the period from March to September 2020, few accommodations really have stopped their activities. At the beginning of September, touristic cities such as Campos do Jordão (SP, Brazil) and Mata de São João (BA, Brazil) generated more reserves than in the pre-quarantine period in March/2020, reaching almost 100% occupation of the accommodation (Panrotas, 2020). As these are touristic cities, this movement indicates a tendency for other Brazilian tourist cities to also follow such growth, however, the contamination by coronavirus continues and, at the current moment, the Brazilian Ministry of Health records 6,071,401 cases and 169,197 deaths from the disease4.

Hypothesis 3: Politicized and Restricted View about the Virus

These data were exposed to have the real dimension of the consequences generated by the desire to escape, which individually seems harmless, but collectively can represents risks, because the more concentration of people together, the more possibilities of spreading the virus.

As mentioned at the beginning of this paper, the pandemic caused by the new coronavirus has brought to light a reality that has revealed the true social vulnerabilities of nations. In the Brazilian case, information about the new virus was often distorted and treated as something fleeting that would not be worthy of concern. And this behavior, motivated by the statements in interviews with the president of Brazil, Jair Messias Bolsonaro, corroborated that a significant part of the population really believed that the coronavirus consists of a “little flu”, in his words told in May/20205.

Unofficial news, fake news about how dealing with coronavirus and the politicization of a collective health scenario—treated as a political strategy to ensure power—made the pandemic be disrepute and make people lead their lives as if this threat it was not real. As example: in addition to statistics, media shows records made on the beaches of Brazil full of people in the middle of a pandemic period. In the city of Rio de Janeiro, for example, even if the city government had imposed rules on distance or restricted use of the beach, such measures were easily circumvented by the population and state governments needed to intervene. The image below is an example of a beach in the city of Rio de Janeiro where the distance measures were not respected. The image denounces a news item published on the website of the Federal Senate dated August /2020, when Brazil registered almost four million confirmed cases of people infected by the coronavirus (Ministry of Health, 2020).

Although the federal executive authorities’ concern was to save the economy, the duality between staying at home versus working was—and it is still—very latent in Brazil, mainly due to the number of informal jobs. Financial aid was given to citizens who work in informal jobs and unemployed people who need financial help, thus allowing people not to suffer.

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4 Data collected on November 23, 2020.
While it is impossible to predict how will be the world post-epidemic, it is pertinent to note that despite being profoundly impacted, the technical-scientific-informational environment is more than ever a defining factor of society in isolation. One certainty remains: the pandemic will demand the acquisition of digital antibodies essential for life in the brave new world that is approaching (Medeiros, Rocha, & Goldoni, 2020).

**Conclusions**

Although it is difficult to specify how the “new normal” will act in society from now on, the innovations developed by the tourism sectors for entertainment purposes were very valid in the period of social quarantine. The Internet was a great helper at this time, as it allowed access to entertainment, but in a different way.

However, there were those ones who preferred to enjoy the experiences physically, even if the capacity of the attractions was reduced. And this massive attitude leaves doubts about how prepared Brazilian society is to face the pandemic to temporarily abdicate personal pleasure due to a collective need.

Traveling is also a health benefit, but in the actual moment this benefit is threatened by a high risk of contamination and the situation takes on proportions that are beyond personal control and the measures for containment have become public responsibility. However, Brazil is a country that, in the present, is politically divided and this division influences people’s behavior in relation to the public health problem. Protests are being made in major cities across the country to challenge the validity of the coronavirus vaccine and to take a stand against vaccination. And such protests are made with agglomerations, disobeying protocols of distancing.

Before the pandemic, there were leisure options through practical activities, such as leisure in nature or social activities in places as: cinemas, parties, beaches, bars, shows, and so on. And leisure tourism was moving the economy of destinations. But social distance brought an impact on leisure, which has been redefined by activities at home. But there are still those people who travel and seek leisure in hotels, resorts, and other types...
of accommodation that, although they are taking preventive measures, the risk of contagion still exists and can occur. The three hypotheses discussed show that the person, even though aware of the risks, chooses to ignore reality and assumes the risk of becoming infected in different environments than their own home.

The activity depends on other sectors for its operation, so tourism suffers financially from such losses and with the accommodations, the effects of the negative economic impact are felt quickly. But between the need to keep the economic sectors functioning and the need to preserve public health, there is a great debate that divides opinions. And leisure through hospitality is just a small sample that reflects in data a behavior that, in an empirical way, it is possible to observe: the perspective of the Brazilian citizen in facing the pandemic.

References


