

# International travel agent keeps the travel dreams of clients alive while business expansion dreams are put on hold.

Local business commits to manage travel plans and engage with suppliers remotely as covid-imposed international border closures continue

Just two years ago, successful local travel agent Steve Cairns was planning to open multiple storefronts for his growing Liberty Tours travel agency, with dreams of launching a companion premium travel brand.

Steve Cairns is the Managing Director of the Liberty Tours Group - an AFTA and CLIA accredited\* independent travel agency based in Sydney's inner west – who has optimistically kept the doors of his primary business open over the past 16 months but has now made the difficult decision to downsize rather than expand.

"I established Liberty Tours with my partner Alex four years ago, and while the initial years saw incredible growth, Covid imposed travel restrictions have had a dampening effect on our planned business aspirations," said Steve.

"Great value global holidays is what we are known for - with Alex expertly packaging wonderful air/land/sea itineraries across Europe and the Mediterranean."

Prior to international boarder closures, Steve had bold plans for growth and expansion, with a steady stream of clients booking international land tours and back-to-back cruises all over the globe.

They had also bolstered their sales and marketing capabilities in late 2019, employing destination specialists familiar with South America and Northern Europe, plus a marketing specialist to help drive effective client communications and social media engagement.

Even as extended border closures loomed as the Pandemic spread worldwide, Liberty Tours continued to help loyal customers with travel exemptions book one way journey to their homelands and looked with confidence into the future.

"We saw the "pause" in travel as an opportunity – channelling our energies into enhancing some of our core website functions to develop an expanded online booking portal, conducting online information sessions, investing in systems and training and continuing, as always, to provide exceptional customer service to existing and new clients who were still travelling with approved travel exemptions, and those who needed their travel credits managed," said Steve.

As borders closed and future trips were cancelled, new customers were unable to confirm holiday and business plans, so Steve and his team pivoted, working with the destination knowledge they had, and embarked on a regular series of online "Travelogues" to keep travel dreams alive.

Steve reached out to his trusted travel partners, and featured guest presenter covering destinations both locally and abroad, covering topics as diverse as the Goldfields of Victoria, the secrets of Sri Lanka and even had a third generation Sherpa take clients on a virtual trek in Nepal! Steve took clients on virtual tours of the Battlefields of Western Europe on Anzac Day and discussed the appeal of tours of faith at Easter.

So confident was Steve in the future of travel that he launched a second brand, Luminosity Travel in mid 2020.

Designed with purpose to assist those holiday makers seeking longer and more destination immersive holidays - both land tours incorporating five star experiences and longer luxury cruises – they did a soft launch his new brand offering into the Australian market with a purposeful look and feel, new website, new trade arrangements, dedicated social media presence and paid advertising to entice future bookings from new clients into 2021 and beyond.

While Steve is still confident that both his business will survive and again flourish, knowing that Australians will be keen to travel again once the international borders open up, his resilience is now being tested.

Sadly, his dreams to further expand his dual travel businesses further are currently paused.

Even though he has now laid off all staff members, his mobile travel operations to continue to service those loyal clients who have travel credits and have indicated they will be booking holidays again as soon as the Government allows international travel to resume.

"We are meeting still with clients and operators in our favourite local cafes. I've had my first vaccination. I've started going to the gym. We keep scouting for new retail locations and we are looking forward to cruising again – we are doing all we can to keep the travel dreams of the future alive and kicking," said Steve with a smile.

Steve is happy to share his story, his hopes and the challenges he and Alex have faced over the past 16 months. They know that travellers will return, seeking guidance to rebook the overseas holiday experiences they have put on hold and to discover new destinations, people and cultures. He and Alex will be there to design and deliver the holidays of their dreams when the world re-opens.

AFTA Australian Federation of Travel Agents

CLIA Cruise Line International Association

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