

## If you pay them, they will come: the US city giving tourists cash to visit

**Level:** Advanced

### 1 Warmer

a. These six countries were the ones most visited in the world by foreign tourists in 2019 (before the pandemic). Put them in order from 1 (the most visited) to 6 (the least visited).

\_\_\_\_\_ China

\_\_\_\_\_ the USA

\_\_\_\_\_ Italy

\_\_\_\_\_ Turkey

\_\_\_\_\_ France

\_\_\_\_\_ Spain

### 2 Key words

a. Fill the gaps in the sentences using these key words from the text.

anecdotal      dry up      grant      hook      impact  
incentive      instalment      jumpstart      momentum      non-essential  
occupancy      remotely      straightforward      usher in      winery

1. If something is described as \_\_\_\_\_, it is not complicated to understand.
2. If people \_\_\_\_\_ something, they quickly make it work after a period of failure.
3. If visitors \_\_\_\_\_, they completely stop visiting a place.
4. If you work \_\_\_\_\_, you work from home using a computer rather than going to the office.
5. \_\_\_\_\_ is the percentage of people using a facility such as a hotel.
6. A / An \_\_\_\_\_ is something that makes you want to do something because you know you will benefit by doing this.
7. If you \_\_\_\_\_ an activity or a process, you make it start.
8. \_\_\_\_\_ travel is not really necessary.

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9. A / An \_\_\_\_\_ is an American term for *vineyard*.
10. A / An \_\_\_\_\_ is the effect that something has.
11. A / An \_\_\_\_\_ is an amount of money that a government or an organization gives people for a specific purpose that does not need to be paid back.
12. A / An \_\_\_\_\_ story is one that is based on someone's personal experience.
13. If a telephone rings off the \_\_\_\_\_, it is constantly ringing due to a large number of calls.
14. A / An \_\_\_\_\_ is one of several parts that a programme is divided into.
15. \_\_\_\_\_ is progress or development that is becoming faster or stronger.

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### ***Redmond, Washington saw visitor numbers plummet when the pandemic struck but its novel response is a hit***

**Hallie Golden**

**9 April, 2021**

- 1 Microsoft's hometown of Redmond, Washington has turned to a very straightforward technique to jumpstart tourism more than a year after Covid-19 struck and the corporate travel it had come to rely on dried up – pay people to visit.
- 2 The small city just east of Seattle is home to Microsoft's headquarters, along with such companies as Nintendo of America, the aerospace company SpaceX and Facebook. So, on 4 March, 2020, when Microsoft recommended its tens of thousands of employees in the city work remotely and other local companies followed suit, the impact was felt by many local businesses, particularly the hotel industry, explained tourism manager Peter Klauser. "The hotels went from a 65 per cent to 85 per cent occupancy range, down to 6 per cent or 9 per cent," he said. "There were times when there might even have been just one guest in an entire hotel."
- 3 Months later, when the situation remained largely unchanged, Klauser was brainstorming creative solutions to attract visitors back to the city when he joked to colleagues: "Why don't we just give them some cash?" The idea sparked "You Stay, We Pay", a programme launched in late March, which involves awarding the first 500 visitors who stay two or more nights at a participating hotel 100 dollars-worth of the community currency, "Geek Out Gold".
- 4 Nor is Redmond alone. After tourism-reliant cities across the US saw their economies hit by the pandemic and resulting shutdowns, others too have turned to this type of financial incentive programme to usher in a fresh wave of socially distanced visitors.
- 5 Glenwood Springs, Colorado, for example, a resort community 40 miles north-west of Aspen, typically sees 1.5 million visitors a year. But after its hotels were closed to non-essential travel in April, 2020 and its hot springs shut down for months over the summer, the town started offering 100-dollar certificates to visitors who booked hotel rooms.
- 6 Lisa Langer, director of tourism promotion at Visit Glenwood Springs, said that while the programme, which was launched in June, 2020 never brought them back to normal visitor levels, it did serve as an important – though temporary – "Band-Aid". "That energized us and kept us going through a very tough time," she said. "But now I feel like we are on the right track and we're going to come back strong. I'm not as worried as I was last year at this time."
- 7 Santa Maria Valley, in central California, created a similar programme in February, presenting the first 500 visitors who booked at least a two-night stay in one of its hotels, with a 100-dollar Visa gift card. The community known for BBQ and wineries sold out in two days, and then saw 2,543 additional people sign up on its waiting list, according to Jennifer Harrison, tourism director of Visit Santa Maria Valley.
- 8 She attributed the success not just to the financial incentive but also the timing ("people were ready to travel," she said) and the community's clear commitment to social distancing and masks. And now, after the programme has officially ended, it's continuing to have an impact. "We're still seeing the results of the future reservations for it. We've had a huge increase in engagement on our social platforms. I mean, it's just been a big win for us," she said.
- 9 In Redmond, Klauser said, the programme initially faced some challenges with simply getting local merchants to agree to be a part of it but, in the end, they were able to get about 50 merchants on board, including restaurants, fitness facilities, salons and bookshops. Officials then used funds from the city's 1 per cent lodging tax, which was meant for event grants but had gone largely unused the previous year, for the programme's 50,000 dollars-worth of incentives.
- 10 Klauser said that, less than two weeks after the programme launched, they had booked 750 of the anticipated 1,000-room nights and awarded more than 30,000 dollars to visitors.
- 11 "The anecdotal story from the hoteliers this week is that their phones are ringing off the hook and that people are super excited,"

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explained Klauser. "You know, they're getting more reservations than they've seen in well over a year. And so it's been highly positive on all sides."

- 12 On 22 March, Microsoft announced it would be reopening its campus in Redmond to employees, which Klauser considers great news for the city. But he doesn't see the change having a particularly noticeable impact anytime soon. In fact, he's already looking into launching a second instalment of the incentive programme after this one finishes. "The momentum has been so great that we want to try to keep it going for a little longer if we can, so that's why we're exploring options for a future phase of this," he said.

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### 3 Comprehension check

a. Answer the questions using information from the article.

1. What is the simple technique that Redmond is using to bring back tourists?
2. What kind of travel did the hotels of Redmond particularly rely on before the Covid pandemic?
3. What was Peter Klauser doing when he came up with the idea of giving visitors cash?
4. What is "Geek Out Gold"?
5. How many people visit Glenwood Springs in a typical year?
6. How does Lisa Langer feel about the future prospects for Glenwood Springs?
7. Apart from the financial incentive, why, according to Jennifer Harrison, has the programme in Santa Maria Valley been so successful?
8. How did Redmond raise 50,000 dollars to fund its programme?
9. What, according to Peter Klauser, is great news for Redmond?
10. What is Klauser proposing to do after the current incentive programme finishes?

### 4 Using key language

a. Match the verbs in the left-hand column with the nouns or noun phrases in the right-hand column.

- |            |                            |
|------------|----------------------------|
| 1. launch  | a. a challenge             |
| 2. feel    | b. a hotel room            |
| 3. attract | c. an impact               |
| 4. book    | d. a programme             |
| 5. have    | e. options                 |
| 6. face    | f. suit                    |
| 7. explore | g. the impact of something |
| 8. follow  | h. visitors                |

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### 5 Discussion

a. Discuss these statements.

- “Paying people to visit your city is a great idea.”
- “The Covid pandemic will mean the end of tourism as we know it.”
- “Working from home is the future of the world of business.”

### 6 In your own words

a. The article describes attracting visitors back to US towns by offering them financial incentives.

Imagine that you are a member of a committee for promoting tourism in your town or city. Just as in Redmond and Glenwood Springs, the pandemic has led to empty hotels and the almost complete absence of foreign tourists. Your task is to find ways of attracting visitors back to your town or city that do not include offering them money to visit.

Think of at least five different ways of increasing visitor numbers and write a short report (150 to 200 words) outlining your proposals.