

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

Level: Intermediate

1 Warmer

- a. In 2019 (before the pandemic), these were the six most visited countries by foreign tourists. 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. Find the following words in the text. The paragraph numbers are given to help you.

1. an adjective meaning *relating to large companies* _____ (para 1)

2. a verb meaning *stopped completely* _____ (two words, para 1)

3. a verb meaning *develop new ideas through a discussion in which people make suggestions and the best ones are chosen* _____ (para 3)

4. an adjective meaning *unnecessary* _____ (para 4)

5. an adjective meaning *extra* _____ (para 6)

6. a noun meaning *something that makes you want to do something because you know you will benefit by doing this* _____ (para 6)

7. a noun meaning *things that need a lot of skill, energy and determination to achieve* _____ (para 7)

8. a plural noun meaning *money you have for a particular purpose* _____ (para 7)

9. a noun meaning *accommodation* _____ (para 7)

10. a noun meaning an *effect or an influence* _____ (para 9)

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- 1 Businesses in Microsoft's hometown of Redmond, Washington, used to rely on corporate travel. Then the Covid pandemic started and visitor numbers dried up. Now Redmond is using a very simple technique to restart tourism – paying people to visit.
- 2 The small city just east of Seattle is home to Microsoft's headquarters, as well 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 from home and other local companies did the same, many local businesses suffered, particularly the hotel industry. "The hotels went from 65 per cent to 85 per cent full, down to 6 per cent or 9 per cent," said tourism manager Peter Klauser. "There were times when one hotel had just one guest in the entire hotel."
- 3 Months later, 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 led to "You Stay, We Pay", a programme which involves giving the first 500 visitors who stay two or more nights at a participating hotel 100 dollars.
- 4 Redmond is not the only city doing this. Glenwood Springs, Colorado normally welcomes 1.5 million visitors a year. But after its hotels were closed to non-essential travel in April, 2020, the town started offering 100-dollar certificates to visitors who booked hotel rooms.
- 5 Director of tourism Lisa Langer said the programme didn't bring them back to normal visitor levels but it kept them going through a very difficult time. "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," she said.
- 6 Santa Maria Valley, in California, has created a similar programme, 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. It sold out in two days, with another 2,543 additional people on the waiting list, according to tourism director Jennifer Harrison. She said the success was not just because of 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.
- 7 In Redmond, Klauser said, the programme initially faced some challenges with simply getting local businesses to agree to be a part of it but, in the end, about 50 businesses joined the programme, including restaurants, fitness centres, salons and bookshops. Officials then used funds from the city's 1 per cent lodging tax, most of which was unused from the previous year, to pay for the programme's 50,000 dollars-worth of incentives.
- 8 Klauser said that, less than two weeks after the programme started, they had booked 750 of the expected 1,000-room nights and given more than 30,000 dollars to visitors. "Hotel owners are saying that their phones haven't stopped ringing and they are very excited," explained Klauser. "You know, they're getting more reservations than they've had in more than a year."
- 9 On 22 March, Microsoft announced it would soon reopen its campus in Redmond to employees, which Klauser considers great news for the city. But he doesn't think it will have an immediate impact. In fact, he's already looking into starting a second 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," he said.

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3 Comprehension check

a. Are these statements true (T) or false (F) according to the article? Correct any that are false.

1. Before the pandemic, businesses in Redmond relied on corporate travel. T / F
2. In March 2020, Microsoft advised its employees to work from home. T / F
3. After this, hotels in Redmond went from 6 per cent to 9 per cent full to between 65 per cent and 85 per cent full. T / F
4. Visitors have to stay more than two nights to get 100 dollars under the 'You Stay, We Pay' programme. T / F
5. After a similar programme in Glenwood Springs, visitor numbers are back to normal. T / F
6. Lisa Langer is now more worried than she was in April 2020. T / F
7. The programme in Santa Maria Valley offered the first 500 visitors who booked a two-night stay a Visa gift card. T / F
8. In Santa Maria Valley, they still follow social distancing rules and people have to wear masks. T / F
9. In Redmond, they paid for the incentives using money from the 1 per cent lodging tax. T / F
10. When Microsoft reopens its campus to employees, Peter Klauser thinks this will have an immediate effect. T / F

4 Using key language

a. Complete the phrases from the text using prepositions.

1. _____ the right track
2. _____ the waiting list
3. rely _____
4. just east _____ Seattle
5. back _____ normal
6. last year _____ this time
7. _____ the end
8. great news _____ the city

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5 Discussion

a. Discuss these statements.

- “Giving visitors money is the only way to get tourists back.”
- “Working from home will change the world for the better.”
- “The pandemic will lead to the end of air travel.”

6 In your own words

a. One of your friends from another country is going to visit your town or city for a weekend break. Your friend has asked you to recommend:

- some interesting places to visit
- some things to do (e.g. sporting activities)
- some specialities of your region to try (food and drink)
- the best way to travel around
- some interesting gifts for friends back home.

Write an email to your friend with some advice.