

Case Study Bringing it home for travellers during the pandemic



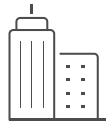
Case Study

Bringing it home for travellers during the pandemic



2-year

project to support the
NSW Government Hotel
Quarantine operation



20+

hotels within Sydney
CBD fringe



260,000+

hotel guests requiring 14-day
stay in mandatory quarantine

Sometimes a job isn't just a job.

When FCM was asked to support the hotel quarantine program in NSW at the start of COVID-19, the team probably didn't realise what lay ahead. Nor could they predict the scale of the project. Or the logistical complexities.

The request saw FCM become a key partner behind Australia's most successful hotel quarantine program. During the two-year program, FCM together with multiple NSW Government stakeholders and over 20 hotels, accommodated approximately 260,000 guests.

From the initial expression of interest (EOI) proposal to invite hotels to participate, to the scaling back of the operation in early 2022, the program was as remarkable as it was critical. Those involved were operating in uncharted territory. There was no blueprint for this kind of job.

Despite this, the NSW hotel quarantine program turned out to be a 'key pillar in protecting NSW from the worst of the COVID-19 pandemic'. It also took out the prestigious 2021 NSW Premier's Award for Recovery and Resilience (Recovery and Resilience category).

The early days

Since 2016, FCM has been the incumbent Travel Management Company providing travel services to NSW Government agencies. In March 2020, NSW Treasury via NSW Procurement contacted FCM to support to stand up a program to assist returning Australian travellers undertaking mandatory 14-day hotel quarantine. The immediate first step for FCM was to get hotels on board. FCM engaged the highly experienced FCM Consulting team to issue an EOI RFP including more than nine specific COVID-related criteria, which hotels would have to meet. The program started with four hotels.

On 27 March 2020, the program was mobilised, when over 1000 international travellers were expected to arrive in Sydney on 28 March. Inbound travellers would be processed at the airport and bussed to their accommodation. Between the plane landing and guests arriving at hotels, essential information about the inbound travellers had to be confirmed and conveyed to hotels. Details included guest numbers, whether the guests were couples, families, singles, their health status, dietary requirements ... to list a few. From here hotels had to rapidly coordinate their inventory to provide the right configuration of rooms.



Program evolution

FCM's Head of Account Management NSW (former), Michelle Leffley, said that at the start of the program it was challenging for all stakeholders involved to ensure the right communication channels were in place and that information was getting to the right people quickly.

"Australian authorities would advise FCM 24-hours prior to the aircraft landing how many passengers were arriving and then we would ensure there were adequate rooms across hotels to accommodate everyone. At the start it was challenging because it was all new. However, by working collaboratively with multiple NSW Government agencies and the hotels, we put plans in place to streamline the process," Michelle said.

This involved - :

- Daily meetings with senior program governance stakeholders.
- Daily calls with the general managers of participating hotels and key government agency stakeholders. Once the program became streamlined this dropped to twice weekly calls.

FCM appointed two travel managers from its NSW Government travel team in Sydney to work onsite at the emergency operation centre for split eight-hour shifts seven days a week. This travel manager was the day-to-day travel contact for NSW Government agencies leading the operation. The on-site Travel Managers were supported by FCM's broader NSW Government travel team based in FCM's Sydney office. Michelle Leffley was FCM's representative on the quarantine program governance team and led the program from FCM's side end to end. Michelle always went above and beyond. She was on call 24x7 ensuring adequate room availability and meeting program needs.

FCM maintained a rotating roster of when the hotels taking part in the program were ready for guest 'bump in' and 'bump out'. This included the additional program stakeholders required to service guests, such as hotel staff, health support teams, security, police, catering and cleaning teams.

"There was a lot of communication between stakeholders to keep things running smoothly. Because we held the relationships with the hotel suppliers we became the essential source for all information," Michelle said.

Key stakeholders

The success of the program has been attributed to the effective collaboration between -:

- FCM's dedicated hotel quarantine and NSW government teams
- NSW Treasury and NSW Procurement
- Multiple NSW government agencies, and
- Hotels participating in program.

Of the 260,000 hotel guests who went through hotel quarantine, there were couples, families, singles, seasonal workers, refugees, sporting groups, celebrities, performers and their entourages.

Surprise and delight moments

Unknown to many in the Australian community, there was extensive work that went on behind the scenes to ensure quarantine guests enjoyed their stay. Each time a hotel would come online for their next bump-in, FCM received a schedule of entertainment planned for the new arrivals. The objective from each hotel was to create an 'experience' for their guests. Initiatives included -:

- Concerts and performances in forecourts where guests could sit on their balconies or watch from windows
- Trivia nights
- Competitions
- In-room games and activities
- Surprise meals and guest gifts.

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In reflection

The hotel quarantine program had many moving parts and was constantly evolving. It was highly emotive for weary travellers. Stakeholders managing the program operated under intense pressure and scrutiny from the Australian public.

But to everyone's credit the program evolved into a highly efficient and effective initiative that protected the health of the Australian community.

FCM's contribution to the program highlighted our:

- commitment to go above and beyond for clients and the community (We're talking night-time shifts that sometimes didn't finish until 5am the next day!)
- ability to solve complex logistical problems quickly while under pressure
- preparedness to think outside the box for urgent contingency plans (ie when passenger numbers were significantly higher than the number of rooms available)
- strong relationships with hotel suppliers
- ability to arrange and manage contracts with industries that usually would be outside our scope of work, such as catering providers
- knowledge of the inbound travel process and government policy framework
- ability to work collaboratively and align our travel partners with government directives
- ability to streamline invoicing and provide bespoke reporting
- ability to work under high pressure 24x7 managing needs and expectations from multiple government stakeholders

Naturally it wasn't just FCM's capabilities that made the program work. Every stakeholder had a part to play in the success of the hotel quarantine program.

Comments from the frontline:

"On behalf of (NSW Government agency), I write to express my sincere appreciation to yourself, the FCM team, and the many hotel general managers and employees for the significant contribution the team has made to the NSW hotel quarantine program over the last 20 months.

The hotel quarantine program has been a key pillar in protecting NSW from the worst of the COVID-19 pandemic. Collectively, the hotels have provided capacity and service to enable over 240,000 people to return to NSW. From its rapidly mobilised beginnings through to today's finely tuned, mature operations, the program has effectively protected the safety of the NSW community and provided a remarkable service to the broader Australian community. Each hotel team can be very proud of their roles in welcoming home weary travellers under less-than-ideal circumstances, providing generous hospitality and reuniting families."

HOTEL QUARANTINE PARTNER

