

Coronavirus – The way back for tourism

The Tourism Secretary, Fergus Ewing, made a statement to The Scottish Parliament today announcing the way out of lockdown for the tourism industry in Scotland.

And it could open up again in just a month's time.

Mr Ewing explained that the next reviews of relaxation of the coronavirus restrictions will be on 18 June and 9 July 2020, and that the tourism industry should get ready for reopening in the middle of July.

But, he also warned that nothing is guaranteed, that the evidence may change and so alter what will happen in this most important of Scottish business sectors.

A new Scottish Recovery Tourism Taskforce will assist with the ongoing reset of the sector – and a provisional date of 15 July has been set for when tourism businesses may be able to resume operations, dependent on public health advice and progression to Phase 3 of the Scottish Government lockdown route-map.



fbpic- Scottish Parliament Holyrood.
Fergus Ewing MSP Cabinet Secretary for Rural Economy,
Ministerial Statement: COVID-19 (Tourism) today at the

Covid-19 social distancing Scottish Parliament, Holyrood
Edinburgh.

Scotland Lockdown Coronavirus.

Scotland Scottish politics.

Poolphoto/Fraser Bremner/Scottish Daily Mail

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Here is what Mr Ewing said in full:

Statement given by Tourism Secretary Fergus Ewing to the
Scottish Parliament, Edinburgh.

Presiding Officer, the current situation with Covid-19 is one
of the biggest challenges we have faced in our lifetimes.

Preservation of life has been our overriding objective since
the start of this crisis. It's that simple.

By staying at home and following the physical distancing
guidance the people of Scotland are doing everything they can
to protect our NHS, our social care services, and to save
lives.

However, the measures we have taken, and are continuing to
take, to deal with this crisis reflect its magnitude. We have
had to implement restrictions on liberties which have had a
very serious impact on our economy, and our tourism and
hospitality sector has been devastated.

I understand how difficult this is. Businesses have gone
from anticipating another bumper tourism season this summer to
seeing their income drop to zero almost overnight.

Presiding Officer, the Scottish and UK Governments have moved
quickly to try to address the financial challenges faced by
businesses affected by the current crisis, including those in
the tourism and hospitality sector.

The Scottish Government has provided a package of support worth over £2.3 billion – going above and beyond the UK Government consequentials. We have provided rates relief, developed grant schemes not available elsewhere in the UK and we have met with and listened to businesses to understand where gaps still exist.

Since the middle of March, I myself have spent much of my time taking part in calls with sectoral organisations and business owners to hear first-hand the impact restrictions are having.

Many taking part in these calls have suffered the most severe impacts upon their lives and their livelihoods.

I would like to commend the work of organisations like the Scottish Tourism Alliance and UK Hospitality in representing their sectors and providing a vital bridge between the Scottish Government and businesses.

We have worked in partnership to ensure that the UK Government understands the pressures on the industry in Scotland.

That work is not completed. Kate Forbes and I have written to the Chancellor to request a discussion on how we can work together to further support the sector and alleviate some of the pressures on businesses, including through a review of VAT rates.

The UK Government must lead on a financial recovery plan for tourism in the UK with significant funding attached, and we will use those consequentials for the industry in Scotland.

From my numerous discussions with industry over the past weeks and months I know that what the industry needs now is clarity on when it will be able to re-open and start on the long road back to sustainability and growth.

I fully understand the unique challenges the uncertainty is creating. Businesses need to know what orders to place and

when. They need to have more confidence to take bookings whilst understanding the risks inherent in the continued presence of the virus.

To take bookings they need to be able to plan staff rotas and shifts, and to restock, and they need to be in a position of readiness to go once restrictions are lifted and avoid any unnecessary delays. Some businesses may also wish to pre purchase PPE equipment.

Visitors also need time to request annual leave and to make bookings.

Notice, preparedness and readiness go hand in hand and are a key part of preparing for recovery.

The Scottish Government understands the exceptional and very challenging circumstances facing our Tourism and Hospitality sector. It is heavily dependent on seasonality, meaning the already limited opportunities are narrowing by the day. Many businesses are facing key decisions on their future, with all the implications for jobs and investment. It is an unenviable position by any measure.

I do not seek to underplay the impact this crisis is having on all parts of Scotland's economy – it is, Presiding Officer, profound – but these facts do set this sector apart and this needs to be recognised. We have heard the messages clearly and we are not impervious to the sectors' calls for more clarity.

Our responsibility is to balance the exceptional circumstances of the industry with the need to continue to take the right steps at the right time to protect life. Let us remember COVID-19 has not gone away and it remains a threat.

However I am keen to give additional clarity where possible and to provide an indicative date from which we hope the sector can begin to operate.

This cannot be definitive.

The science and health advice must be in the right place – the virus must have been suppressed, the Test and Protect system must be used effectively, and our Route-map must be on course.

Given the vital interdependencies between the tourism and hospitality sector and the wider sectors of the economy, including public transport, we must make holistic decisions about when to change restrictions. We cannot make changes for any sector, Presiding Officer, in isolation. This is why we must be assured that the epidemic is suppressed to enable the more general opening up of our country that will come with the re-opening of tourism and hospitality – so that everyone – employees, tourists, customers – can be confident that it is safe to make this change.

Statutory reviews of the current restrictions are required on 18 June and 9 July. Those reviews must take place and the outcomes of them must show the necessary progress in our fight against the virus for tourism to resume.

As things stand just now, our hope is that we will be able to give the go ahead to a re-opening of the sector at the 9 July review.

Assuming this does prove possible, some time would then be required for interconnected services such as transport to prepare.

On that basis and on the clear understanding with the industry that nothing can be absolutely guaranteed at this stage and that we may need to change this date if the evidence requires it, we would encourage tourism and hospitality businesses to prepare – within appropriate safety guidelines – for re-opening on 15 July.

For the reasons I have set out, this timetable is by necessity

both provisional and conditional – but we very much hope it can be met and that setting it out now, even with caveats, gives the sector greater clarity and some much needed ability to plan ahead.

And I cannot stress enough how important it is for the time until then to be used to implement the changes that are necessary to satisfy regulations and adapt to a new way of living.

On that – I will say something about this new way of life – because things will not be the same as before. Covid-19 has changed that, and safety must come first.

I can therefore also announce that we will soon be publishing guidance for the tourism and hospitality sector that will help businesses make the necessary changes.

We have worked closely with the industry in this area and this will provide a key link between government and the good work done across the sector to prepare guidelines and practical measures for safe re-opening.

It will mean things will look and feel different and I understand that this is also a challenge for businesses. Workplaces will need to adapt and innovate to make best use of space and facilities within the guidelines.

There will be a key role for the industry in building confidence in communities who may understandably be hesitant to welcome back visitors.

Customers – us, the public – will also need to adapt to new ways of using these services, just as we have had to do throughout the crisis – but I do have confidence everyone will – once again – rise to that challenge.

I accept it is disruptive and difficult. The measures are however essential to ensure workplaces are safe and compliant

– and in keeping with our Fair Work principles they have been developed in partnership with trade unions and the appropriate regulatory bodies.

It will give confidence to employers, employees, customers and the public that Scotland's tourism and hospitality sector is prepared and ready to once again provide safe, reliable and enjoyable experiences.

Presiding Officer if I may make one final announcement before I finish – I want to highlight today that I am setting up a Scottish Tourism Recovery Taskforce to take forward strategic oversight of, and provision of advice on, recovery plans in response to the Covid-19 impact on Scottish tourism and hospitality.

This taskforce will be responsible for ensuring that the tourism recovery plan is fully coordinated with wider Scottish Government and other recovery plans.

It will also take into account wider actions being taken by the UK Government, other devolved administrations and international best practice, including that of the European Union.

I will Chair this taskforce along with my colleague, the Minister for Business, Fair Work and Skills, Jamie Hepburn.

I will announce the membership shortly – we are in the process of seeking to finalise this – and will publish a draft work plan for the group, which will include:

- looking at recovery needs for the sector ,
- working with devolved administrations and UK Government on UK level interventions,
- developing a domestic visitor marketing campaign, and
- crucially, clear public messaging around the safe recovery of tourism and the economic benefits for our communities.

It will work with closely with the sector, allowing us to identify the key actions necessary for a strong and safe recovery.

Presiding Officer, 3 months ago, at the start of March, I was involved in the launch of Scotland's new tourism strategy, taking us through to 2030. That strategy sought to make Scotland the world leader in 21st century tourism.

That should still be our ambition. Scotland has a wealth of assets and a wonderful reputation as a welcoming country. The Covid-19 crisis has been devastating for the industry, but we must look to rebuild the sector and to begin welcoming visitors once again.

We recognise that in order to achieve that businesses must be ready to go when safe to do so and avoid any unnecessary delay, inflicting yet more reputational and financial harm. Today's further clarity on when that may happen will help avoid that and assist them to be ready to reopen.

Under the guidance of the new tourism taskforce, and with the incredible dedication and hard work of the thousands who work in tourism and hospitality, both in the public and private sectors, I believe we can make a strong and safe recovery.

Thank you.