

Tourism chiefs hail virtual pilot to boost visitor numbers

An inaugural virtual event pilot run by VisitScotland to link Scottish tourism businesses with global tour operators and travel agents has been hailed a success by those who took part.

Scotland Reconnect 2020 saw a total of 264 buyers from 23 countries connecting online with 240 Scottish suppliers for business meetings aimed at booking and creating tour packages for future visitors.

And 21 of the buyers were new to working with VisitScotland on a travel trade event of this kind.

Scotland Reconnect 2020 was also the first of its kind to be delivered by the national tourism organisation and gave tour operators and travel agents the opportunity to rebook visits and tweak programmes that had had to be cancelled this year due to the Covid-19 outbreak.

Events, including VisitScotland's annual Expo travel trade showcase and programmes of business development missions, have long been critical platforms for facilitating these connections but rendered impossible by Covid-19 restrictions this year, new digital platforms like Reconnect have been developed.

Buyers from the USA, Canada, Germany, France, Italy, Spain, Holland, Scandinavia, Australia and Brazil all attended the virtual event, as well as London-based inbound operators representing the Japanese and Chinese markets.

In addition to facilitating more than 5,000 business meetings,

there were also live webinars, round table discussions and breakout sessions and an online presentation hub. Virtual experiences also demonstrated what Scotland can offer buyers' clients, and there were trad music sessions with Gary Innes from top trad band Manran, whisky tasting experiences with Glengoyne Distillery and The Scotch Whisky Experience (picture courtesy of them), as well as storytelling with Mercat Tours.

Participants also heard from global tourism speakers and took part in round table discussions, as VisitScotland's Head of Engagement, Denise Hill, met in conversation with Tom Jenkins, CEO of the European Tour Operators Association on the impact of Brexit on the German and US markets; and Joss Croft, the CEO of UK Inbound, who looked ahead to 2021 and discussed what businesses need to consider when seeking to address current issues and challenges in global tourism.

VisitScotland's Senior Insights Manager, Chris Greenwood, also ran sessions on global trends and Covid-time consumer behaviour. Responsible travel, a theme of growing importance among travelers around the globe, was also on the agenda, as was the promotion of initiatives, including Scotland's Year of Coasts and Waters 2020.