

Tourism in Meltdown

Thursday 23 April, 2020

Fears of a £200m hit for tourism businesses in the Loch Lomond and The Trossachs National Park

Tourism in meltdown as losses grow at an alarming rate

A prolonged lockdown caused by the corona virus pandemic could see at least £200 million wiped off the value of tourism in the National Park this year with the potential loss of at least a quarter of the tourism businesses and over 1,200 redundancies according to a former tourism chief for the area and current Chairman of a leading National Park charity.

The unprecedented lockdown has resulted in tourism revenues tumbling at an alarming rate in the National Park with over £100 million in losses racked up already, including valuable advance group bookings from both UK and international markets being cancelled for the whole year, according to James Fraser, Chairman of the Friends of Loch Lomond and The Trossachs.

Loch Lomond and The Trossachs is one of the most popular tourist destinations in Scotland with over 4 million visitors a year generating spend of over £420 million and sustaining thousands of jobs directly and indirectly.

He warned even if the current restrictions are lifted in time for the peak summer months tourism businesses will have a slow recovery due to factors such as essential social distancing precautions still requiring to be in force and many visitors from important UK and overseas markets being reluctant to travel until an effective virus vaccine is in place. He estimates total losses could exceed £200 million by the end of the year with many businesses struggling to survive.

Mr Fraser, who is in regular contact with a number of businesses in the National Park, said: "In the 40 years I have been involved in the tourist industry I have never witnessed a situation as bad as this and it is much worse than the foot and mouth outbreak in 2001 that led to the shutdown of the countryside.

"In the past 6 weeks it has been upsetting to see so many well run predominantly family businesses, which have been built up with hard work over many years, in such a state of turmoil and fighting for their very existence through no fault of their own.

"Most businesses have gone from looking forward to what was shaping up to be a bumper year with good trading levels to a situation overnight with income generation falling to zero and with no end in sight."

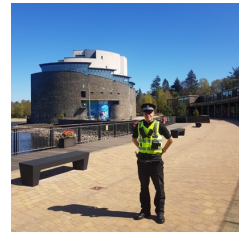
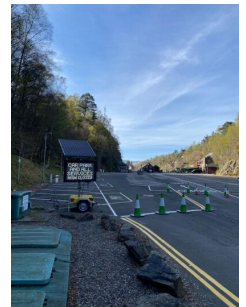
He cited numerous examples of medium sized businesses already losing, on average, £1-2 million so far. Three cruise companies operating on the National Park lochs have lost over £4 million collectively. Hundreds of smaller tourist accommodation, catering and retail businesses and businesses in the supply chain such as tradesmen, laundries, bakers and butchers are also losing substantial sums.

Mr Fraser added: "The response to the growing financial crisis in the tourism sector from both the UK and Scottish Governments and local MSPs and MPS has been impressive and, following representations made locally and nationally, it is very encouraging to see some of the support packages being modified for the better.

"However, given the sheer scale of the downturn in tourism revenues, which no Government support scheme can fully cover, many businesses have been forced to take out very substantial loans as part of their fight for survival and it will take many years for them to recover from what has been, and continues to be, a catastrophic situation here in the National Park and elsewhere with tourism so hugely important to the economy"

In a recent report the OECD estimate declines of 45% to 70% in the international tourism economy in 2020, depending on the duration of the crisis and the speed with which tourism rebounds.

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[Friends of Loch Lomond and The Trossachs](#)

T. 01389 727761

E. carol.lloyd@lochlomond-trosschs.org

W. <https://www.lochlomondtrossachs.org.uk>

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