

Tourism turmoil taking it's toll in Scotland's first National Park

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Half a billion pounds slump in Loch Lomond visitor spend on the horizon

As the anniversary of the first Covid 19 lockdown approaches and with no end in sight to the current shutdown of tourism with travel restrictions likely to remain in place for some time, a former tourist chief for the area and current Chair of a leading National Park charity claims income generated from visitors in the Loch Lomond and The Trossachs National Park is hurtling towards a massive drop of at least £500 million in the coming months with thousands of jobs already gone and many more under threat.

The lockdowns last year and so far this year have resulted in tourism revenues falling at a staggering rate in the National Park with over £300 million in losses racked up already and a further £200 million in the pipeline, including valuable advance bookings from the important English and overseas markets, according to James Fraser, Chair 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 £420 million and sustaining over 6,000 jobs directly and indirectly.

He warned the current prolonged lockdown, along with recent Scottish Government Ministerial advice not to book Easter or summer holidays, means many tourism businesses in the National Park and throughout Scotland continue to be in limbo clinging on by their fingertips in survival mode and unable to plan ahead with any certainty.

Mr Fraser said: "Tourism and hospitality businesses are looking into the abyss with fixed costs increasing due to the recent lengthy cold snap and severely depressed levels of income from forward booking deposits, which are normally buoyant at this time of year. They are becoming more desperate."

"While the various closure and sectoral grant schemes are helpful they fall well short of monthly fixed overheads with many businesses having now exhausted their reserves and borrowing more heavily on top of previous borrowings. More permanent tourism business closures have taken place and more are inevitable the longer the lockdown continues."

"When businesses eventually do re-open various trading restrictions are likely still to be in place limiting capacity and trading potential meaning they could be quite exposed in cashflow terms without more support."

He believes there has been a massive dip in forward bookings from the important overseas and English markets and there is going to be greater reliance on the Scottish market this year. Even with an uplift of a third in 2019 compared to 2018, at 7.7 million trips and a value of £1.4 billion this represented less than 25% of the overall value of tourism to Scotland in 2019.

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