

Tourism in the time of COVID

Outline of the Issues and Basic Principles

Tourism is an important industry in the UK and holidaymakers enjoy psychological benefits from tourism, so it is understandable for both economic and health reasons that there is a desire to encourage tourism as we start to relax some Covid19 controls. We recognise that this will be done at different paces in different parts of the UK with the Scottish Government envisaging 'relaxation of restrictions on accommodation providers (including hotels, B&Bs and holiday homes)' coming in Phase 3¹ rather than as part of Phase 2. It is also likely that if foreign travel restrictions remain in place, there will be an increased demand for UK holidays.

However, it is also recognised that tourism should only be encouraged if it is undertaken with suppression of viral transmission as a key safety principle.

This short paper identifies the principles for a responsible "new normal" for the tourist industry whilst living with the Coronavirus and suggests a number of issues for consideration by tourists, accommodation and service providers and the relevant local authorities. The document has been drafted in a UK context with the acknowledgement that each of the devolved nations of the UK and the regions of England can adopt or adapt it to suit their individual local circumstances. The intention is not to provide final, definitive guidance but to start or assist in local discussions.

To start we would stress that anybody with symptoms must stay at home and not travel until Covid-19 has been confidently ruled out. This, of course, includes anybody instructed to self-isolate. The current advice to the person and all his/her contacts should apply, notably social-isolation for the currently specified period.

Why we think tourism in the UK has specific challenges

- Being on holiday is likely to change people's risk of transmission in complicated ways:
 - People on holiday are often more relaxed and therefore may be less vigilant in adhering to the basic control measures for Covid 19, that is physical distancing², handwashing and face coverings when appropriate. This may increase risk.
 - People on holiday may have reduced exposure through occupational and educational settings, which could reduce risk.
- The risk to the resident population may also change, as for a significant proportion, their place of work and sometimes even their home is the tourist setting.
- Tourism involves movement of large numbers of people from disparate parts of the country. This could lead to the spread of infection between regions and especially to regions that currently have a relatively low prevalence of Covid-19.
- Tourism could lead to mass gatherings increasing the risk of outbreaks. This includes specific cultural and sporting events that may be the purpose of the travel or visiting 'tourist attractions' where numbers may exceed facilities.

1 <https://www.gov.scot/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-framework-decision-making-scotlands-route-map-through-out-crisis/pages/4/>

2 In common with other international authors, we prefer the term "physical distancing" to the term, widely used in the UK, "social distancing".



- There is a risk that the local infrastructure of the region, especially health services such as hospitals and ICU, might not be able to cope with a large increase in population due to tourism.
- Tourism involves a very large number of small businesses and service providers, all of whom will need to adhere to revised regulations and guidance on the management of COVID-19.

Socio-economic impact

Some of our most popular tourism areas in the UK rely heavily on income from tourism and some lie within some of the most socio-economically deprived communities. The impact of reducing tourism in these areas must be balanced against negative impact on the health inequalities. One group we are particularly concerned for is those who work in low paid casual jobs across the summer and rely on this work as their principal income, and who are presumably not able to benefit from furlough. We also need to ensure that employers take measures to reduce the risk of infection for their workers, particularly those with increased susceptibility.

Identified Basic Principles

These principles for tourists, accommodation and service providers and the relevant local authorities follow from our understanding of the natural history of the disease and how Covid-19 can be transmitted.

- 1 Do not leave home if you have symptoms that could be Covid-19.**
- 2 Follow the core principles of physical distancing of 2 metres; of hand washing and of not mixing with other households unless adhering to physical distancing.**
- 3 People can be infectious for up to 48 hours before developing symptoms. Wearing a mask or face-covering can reduce the risk of transmitting Covid-19 when infectious:** consideration should be given to businesses mandating the wearing of face coverings in enclosed spaces.
- 4 The risks of transmission of the virus are increased in enclosed spaces.³** Unfortunately, the weather in the UK is unreliable and therefore consideration should be given by all as to what happens in inclement weather. It is also important to consider “pinch points” where groups may be pushed together, for instance on narrow pathways to access beaches or at facilities such as toilets.
- 5 Contact Tracing is an important control mechanism to address any local outbreaks successfully.** Therefore, this service needs to be appropriately sized and staffed with ready access to testing. People on holiday should be contactable in case the NHS Test and Trace service needs to contact them.
- 6 Providers of accommodation and other services for tourists will need to ensure that their guests and staff can adhere to physical distancing guidance, enhance the cleaning regime that they follow** and may need to consider deep cleans between guests.
- 7 Accommodation providers should have a plan in place should a number of their guests be required to self-isolate.**
- 8 Providers of services should recognise that they may need to close if they themselves have symptoms of or test positive for COVID-19.** Consideration should be given as to how best to support such businesses.
- 9 Follow the appropriate national guidance if you develop Covid19 symptoms.**
- 10 Different types of tourist (from day trippers to second home owner) will require different policy responses and levels of support.**

³ 19 times greater in a recent paper: Nishiura H, Oshitani H, Kobayashi T, Saito T, Sunagawa T, Matsui T, et al. Closed environments facilitate secondary transmission of coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19). medRxiv 2020:2020.02.28.20029272, DOI: 10.1101/2020.02.28.20029272 (<https://www.medrxiv.org/content/10.1101/2020.02.28.20029272v2> or <https://www.medrxiv.org/content/medrxiv/early/2020/04/16/2020.02.28.20029272.full.pdf>).

Types of visitors to tourist areas

We think there is utility in considering the risks and needs of five broad groups of visitors to tourist areas

- Day trippers
- Holiday makers (staying overnight, typically 7 or 14 days)
- Second homeowners potentially staying for extended periods of time or undertaking repeat visits
- Non-resident staff who come to work in the region
- Travellers on business, who may stay from 1 day to several weeks

Each group will need different approaches and solutions.

We also acknowledge that in some parts of the UK, cruise ship passengers are an important group of visitors. However, this group will not be considered in this paper, as it is not expected that these services will be restarting in the near future, though localities particularly affected by them may wish to consider their impact as part of their planning.