Scottish Tourism Emergency Response Group (STERG)

STERG Sector Update Session
Wednesday 1st December 2021

Present:

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<td>Association of Scotland’s Self-Caterers</td>
<td>Fiona Campbell</td>
<td>Scottish Country Sports Tourism Group</td>
<td>Chloe Forbes</td>
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<td>Association of Scottish Visitor Attractions</td>
<td>Gordon Morrison</td>
<td>Scottish Golf Tourism Development Group</td>
<td>Stuart French</td>
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<td>Hostelling Scotland</td>
<td>Margo Paterson</td>
<td>Scottish Guest House and B&amp;B Alliance</td>
<td>Sinclair Williamson</td>
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<td>Independent Hostels</td>
<td>Gregor Barclay</td>
<td>VisitScotland</td>
<td>Rob Dickson</td>
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<td>Scottish Tourism Alliance</td>
<td>Karen Christie</td>
<td>Wild Scotland</td>
<td>Victoria Brooks</td>
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<td>Scottish Tourist Guides Association</td>
<td>Kenneth Bramham</td>
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<td>British Amusement Catering Trade Association</td>
<td>John White</td>
<td>Night Time Industries Association</td>
<td>Donald Macleod</td>
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<td>British Holiday &amp; Home Parks Association</td>
<td>Jeanette Wilson</td>
<td>Sail Scotland</td>
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<td>Discover Scotland’s Gardens</td>
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<td>Historic Houses</td>
<td>Andrew Hopetoun</td>
<td>UKHospitality (Scotland)</td>
<td>Leon Thompson</td>
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Key Notes & Actions

1. General Update
   • Industry Conference
     RD congratulated ASVA, STA and HIT (Scotland) for an impressive industry conference and noted that it was both positive and constructive.

   • Scottish Budget (9th December)
     There is an expectation that there will be a general, public sector funding announcement at the Scottish Budget on the 9th, however it is unclear whether this will provide any clarity on funding for recovery work. VisitScotland is expecting a provisional allocation of funding on the 9th however, again, it is unclear whether recovery funding will be included in core VisitScotland funding or whether it will be additional.

   • Wellbeing and Mental Health
     Work has been done by VisitScotland to update the information which is available on wellbeing and mental health. Once approved by STERG tomorrow, the information will be published on visitscotland.org, this should be early next week.

   • Current COVID Outlook
     The Omicron variant is a concerning situation. Current steps being taken by the Scottish Government is to reinforce the status quo while increasing the emphasis on rolling out booster vaccinations. It is unclear at this point what threat this variant may bring.

     It was noted that the consequences of current actions being taken by SGov may not be too damaging for the domestic market in the short term, assuming the narrative regarding socialising etc doesn’t change in the run up to Christmas. Of greater concern is the impact this will have on international visitors coming to Scotland next year. International inbound operators are raising extreme concern about the current situation as it is acknowledged that it won’t take much to impact an already fragile international market.

     RD cautioned against jumping to rapid conclusions given the uncertainty surrounding the new variant and noted that we will need to wait and see how things progress over Christmas and into the new year. It was highlighted that depending on where we get to with recovery funding, STERG will want to look
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closely at all businesses who are directly impacted by any market changes, such as inbound operators, (who cannot substitute international visitors for domestic visitors), to understand the implications.

2. Sector Issues To Be Raised At STERG

Wild Scotland, Victoria Brooks
- In the short term Wild Scotland are currently working on a new winter campaign ‘Nurture your need for freedom and adventure’ which is aimed at raising the profile of businesses that are open during the winter. Support from sector groups to promote this would be appreciated.
  https://www.wild-scotland.co.uk/
- Longer term, international visitors remain a concern for the sector.
- A number of Wild Scotland members are participating in the Days Out campaign. Wild Scotland will continue to promote this campaign to support the sector.
- The Outdoors Scotland strategy is progressing at pace. Regional workshops are now underway, and 16 workshops are planned to take place before mid-January. Workshops are open to any business, community group, local authority with an interest in Marine, Adventure or Wildlife Tourism. To book a place on any of the workshops please CLICK HERE!

Scottish Tourist Guides Association, Kenneth Bramham
- No new issues to report. STGA keen to understand the potential impact of the new Omicron variant. It was noted anecdotally that one tour has been cancelled for next week.

Hostelling Scotland, Margo Paterson
- Over the last couple of days cancellations have been coming through for bookings within the next couple of months. In addition, overseas groups are raising concerns about bookings in the early part of next year. This is very disappointing as business over the last few months has been ok - COP26 considerably helped city sites in November.
- Hostelling Scotland were due to offer their full hostelling experience at the beginning of next year, this is when shared accommodation would be reopened - this decision will now be reconsidered. Postponing the reopening of shared accommodation will have an impact on groups, particularly groups of school children where it is not possible to accommodate all children in single rooms.
- Significant concern remains about next season.

Independent Hostels, Gregor Barclay
- Scottish Independent Hostels have been focused on developing a new website and marketing campaign with the funds awarded from the Destination & Sector Marketing Fund.
- The hostel sector has a very specific winter market which tends to be groups, for example, hill walking groups. So far members have been reporting healthy bookings for the first quarter however there is now serious concern that public perception of the new Omicron variant, driven by the media and comments from health officials, will impact these bookings. Scottish independent Hostels are seeking feedback from their members on bookings and cancellations, the fear is that this could kill the winter season.

Association of Scottish Visitor Attractions, Gordon Morrison
- Following recent conversations with members, the immediate concern is how badly the winter season will be affected by the Omicron variant. The Days Out campaign is having mixed success, for some it has been very successful, for others, more of a slow burn, however there is concern that recent media messaging will hit consumer confidence resulting in a drop in visitation.
- It was noted that there are some contract issues with the Days Out campaign which VisitScotland are looking to address.
- Longer term there is concern about the impact on international visitors. Within the visitor attraction sector, businesses who rely heavily on international visitors are still well below 2019 visitor numbers, for
example September data shows that overall, the sector is -67% vs 2019, however internationally focused attractions are in a much more difficult position, Royal Yacht Britannia – 211%, Scotch Whisky Experience -373%, Urquhart castle -517% vs 2019. If international visitors do not return, then recovery will be difficult.

Association of Scotland’s Self-Caterers, Fiona Campbell
- As a sector, self-catering is more agile than others in hospitality, however cancellations are now being made by both international and domestic guests as they are unsure about ongoing travel restrictions.
- To avoid continued uncertainty communications from the FM / Scottish Government need to be clear ensuring that they do not induce heightened concern – SGov should not be telling people to cancel holidays or to cancel Christmas.
- STL licensing continues to be the biggest threat to the sector. A cross industry webinar will be held tomorrow (2nd) to discuss where we are, what happens next and what organisations / members can do to help. The ASSC will be joined on the webinar by the Scottish B&B Association, Scotland’s Best B&Bs, Scottish Land & Estates, Gilson Gray, Scottish Agritourism and the Scottish Tourism Alliance.

The survey from the Scottish Government committee was published yesterday. Of the 2,500 responses, 1,300 were operators and 465 were guests, it was noted that there is mass support opposing the legislation.

Scottish Country Sports Tourism Group, Chloe Forbes
- The biggest concern for the sector remains international travel. A recent survey conducted in September highlighted over 50% of providers rely on international travel. Bookings were looking good for this year however these are bookings which have been rolled forward from the previous year and therefore not so good financially. Although guests are wanting to book, the current uncertainty is making people hesitant, particularly international guests. There is increasing concern about bookings for next year.

Scottish Golf Tourism Development Group, Stuart French
- The SIGTOA group held their autumn meeting on Monday (29th). One of the main topics of conversation was the new Omicron variant and the fear that businesses will be faced with the same situation that they have been faced with over the last 20 months.
- Although it is positive to hear that inbound operators will be at the top of the list for recovery funding it should be noted that the inbound operators are still waiting on the second round of survival funding that was promised and has not been delivered.

RD noted that this second round of survival funding may now be wrapped up with the Phase 2 recovery funding.

Scottish Guest House and B&B Alliance Sinclair Williamson
- Following a recent grant from the Destination and Sector Marketing Fund, the Scottish Guest House and B&B Alliance have launched a new marketing campaign which they hope to ramp up between Christmas and New Year and run through to March 2022.
- One of the challenges faced by Guest Houses and B&Bs is that they always seem to be missed by the Scottish Government. The recent Business Ventilation Fund for example does not mention Guest Houses or B&Bs, SGHBBA has written to the tourism minister and the finance minister for clarity. It is hoped that this is an oversight.
- STL licensing is a big issue for SGHBBA members however opinion is divided between support for and against the legislation. SGHBBA will campaign to exclude B&B’s from the legislation, the recommendation is that B&Bs are aligned to hotels.
- There is growing concern about the overseas market. Cancellations for next year are now beginning to come through, particularly in St Andrews and the Highlands.
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3. Meeting Close

- RD thanked everyone for their valued contributions and reinforced the importance of the information and data provided by the group. This evidence is critically important for STERG and for informing wider discussions with the Scottish Government.

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Next Meeting

Wednesday 15th December, 9.00am-9.30am.

2022 meetings will be scheduled from Wednesday 12th January to Wednesday 30th March.