

Tourism Minister's speech at the Extraordinary G20 Tourism Ministers' Meeting on Covid-19

At the beginning of the holy month of Ramadan, I would like to extend my warmest wishes to the people of Saudi Arabia, and all those observing Ramadan. 'Ramadan Kareem', and 'Kul aam wa antum bikhair'.

Firstly I would like to echo others' comments in thanking the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and His Excellency Mr Ahmed Al-Khateeb for organising this virtual meeting.

In the UK as in other countries, our primary focus has been on saving lives and protecting the health of our citizens. But we want to mitigate the impact of the virus on all aspects of society and the economy.

Just like many other countries, Tourism is a great contributor to our economy. In fact, it sustains about 10% of GDP.

Time does not allow me to set out in detail the full range of Government interventions but the economic support most relevant to the tourism and hospitality sector largely falls into two categories.

To support businesses struggling with liquidity, the UK Government has announced:

- Deferral of VAT payments for firms.
- £330bn worth of government backed and guaranteed loans
- A Retail, hospitality and leisure cash grants scheme; and a business rates relief programme and
- Protection for commercial tenants at risk of eviction.

On employment protection we have set up:

- A Job Retention Scheme where employers can apply for a government grant to cover 80% of workers' salaries; and
- A scheme to support Self-Employed workers.
- In addition, we have launched an emergency fund to support local tourism management organisations through this period.

I am in regular discussions with the tourism industry about what their priorities are for the recovery period. This includes how businesses can operate while there are still social distancing measures in place; what further guidance is needed; and whether there is a need for tapered support as businesses adjust.

With nearly 40 million inbound visitors per year, International visitors play a hugely important part of the UK visitor economy and we look forward to welcoming visitors back when it is safe to do so.

The UK is also a key market for outbound travel. UK citizens take 70 million overseas trips each year and once international travel restrictions start to be lifted, there is likely to be considerable demand for travel. I fully support the content of the G20 declaration that when international travel resumes, it needs to be done safely and we need to rebuild consumer confidence.

And that is where this forum can be incredibly helpful. I look forward to working closely with all of you as we help this major global industry recover, and I hope to meet you all in person as soon as circumstances allow.