

are off... xt to go?



the Scottish Government was unable to say if any further talks are planned on the issue before the scheme comes into force on Monday.

Asked on BBC Radio Scotland what will happen if there is no agreement, Mr Matheson said: 'Well, we're looking at the possibility of a range of measures and whether the individual should then have to come to a quarantine facility within Scotland.'

A full list of exemptions from the mandatory hotel quarantine has not yet been published.

But Mr Matheson said it would include those working on 'critical infrastructure', including oil and gas and defence staff.

He estimated that out of the 1,600 people a week currently flying to

Scotland, around 1,200 will enter quarantine hotels.

An Edinburgh Airport spokesman said: 'The statement and ministerial call was our first official engagement on this issue and we were formally advised of the Scottish Government's intention to introduce this very severe measure.'

'We await to hear how they intend to implement this, how it will be enforced, who will enforce it and what we are being asked to contribute.'

'The requirement for restrictions is understood, but we also need to know when we and many other businesses impacted by this decision can expect support to allow us to plan for some sort of recovery.'

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summer. Speaking at the end of last month, the First Minister said she didn't want to be 'blamed' if Scots were forced to cancel booked domestic holiday accommodation.

Scottish ministers have not given any concrete guidance on when travel restrictions will be lifted, but Level 4 rules are in place until at the least the end of this month.

Officially, there's no reason why you should not book a summer staycation now, however ensure that it is with a company that has a flexible cancellation and/or rebooking policy.

Haven, which has two holiday parks in Scotland, and Center Parcs previously announced plans to reopen next month.

How is insurance affected?

THE general advice is still to take

out travel insurance as soon as you have booked your trip, but be aware that policies often have huge holes in them.

Mr Boland said: 'Which? looked at 73 travel insurance policies recently and found only 13 offered OK-ish cover for coronavirus-related cover, and none were comprehensive. Book with a package provider with flexible booking terms.'

Have holiday prices collapsed?

PROVIDERS are slashing prices. A study by TravelSupermarket of price comparison searches for departures between May and October found prices in some destinations were more than 50 per cent lower than during the same period last year.

WITH no international visitors expected now to make any difference to the tourism business balance sheet, staycations are once again all the more important this year.

People across the UK are going to be hugely important to many businesses' survival. The money they spend on holidaying in Scotland will not only support the businesses, but the wider economy and supply chains too.

Quarantine hotels would require international travellers to spend around £1,750 each and sacrifice at least ten days to staying in one room before being allowed to enjoy the rest of their break in Scotland. It's hard to imagine any holiday-maker being willing to do that, let alone able to afford it.

In order to recoup a similar level of income normally brought in from international visitors, Scotland would need some additional 8million visits from the domestic market.

In order for the sector to survive and jobs to be protected we need travel to be permitted not just across different regions in Scotland but across the UK as a whole.

We had great support from our domestic markets last year, but didn't open up as an industry until July 15 - long into the school summer holidays. As a result, there was still a significant drop in domestic spend from prior years.

AS AN industry, we have always said we respect the health agenda - businesses want to open and trade when it is safe to do so. Every tourism business I know wants to welcome people back and do what they do best. The 60 million dollar question, however, is 'When can we do that?'

Politicians are still considering the route map out of lockdown and we have been asking for a signal as to when we can start up again. The uncertainty around the situation is a source of anxiety for business owners as well as the teams they support and their families who rely on that income.

If it has to be a phased return then that's fine, but businesses need to know in what order to be able to plan. We also want customers to be able to book with confidence and businesses to be able to take those bookings with confidence.

At present, there are holidays that could not go ahead here last Easter which customers agreed to postpone for a year. However, at this moment in time, we don't know if those breaks will even be possible

INDUSTRY CANNOT SURVIVE AN EMPTY SUMMER



COMMENTARY
by MARC CROTHALL

this Easter. It takes time and comes at a further cost to administer any changes.

There is also uncertainty over what the Chancellor will say in relation to extending the furlough scheme beyond April, and what financial support businesses can expect. Without it, we will likely see further permanent closures.

Hopefully the impact of vaccine rollout and the lockdown restrictions people have already adhered to will have helped suppress the virus to a level whereby we can open up our domestic tourism sector in the not too distant future and give people the confidence to holiday in Scotland.

We believe the demand is there - but people need certainty, and our sector is desperate to come back to life. Far too many livelihoods and communities depend on it - it is one of the main economic drivers in Scotland.

The majority of companies have gone backwards on their balance sheets. There are very few with sufficient money in the bank to sustain longer periods of closure.

Many have been reduced to

staying on top of basic maintenance, which comes at a cost. So too does the need to heat properties to prevent damage, especially during the current freezing temperatures.

IMPLEMENTING these basics continues to burn a hole in their bank accounts with no money coming in. Many have borrowed money or gone into overdrafts and don't want to take on additional debt.

We can't re-employ people and get the supply chain going again unless businesses can operate. We can't stay closed until the whole world is vaccinated. There must be a balance and the sooner that is found the better.

Much rests on the ability to continue to support the sector financially if it is not possible to trade at Easter.

We certainly need an early start to the summer holidays for recovery to happen and to enable tourism to start making the significant economic contribution it can.

■ Marc Crothall is CEO of The Scottish Tourism Alliance

No MP vote on ten-year Covid penalty

MPS will be denied a vote on plans to hand ten-year jail terms to Covid quarantine cheats - despite growing Tory fury over the move.

Ministers faced a backlash yesterday over the sentence set out by Health Secretary Matt Hancock for trying to avoid hotel quarantine rules.

Former Supreme Court justice Lord Sumption suggested Mr Hancock had 'lost his grip on reality' by imposing a maximum sentence longer than that served by many rapists and killers.

The former head of the Government's legal department, Sir Jonathan Jones, tweeted: 'If anyone is ever sentenced to ten years for lying on the form, I will eat a face mask.'

But the Prime Minister's spokesman yesterday

said that quarantine cheats would be prosecuted under the 1981 Forgery Act for making false declarations, 'so there is no requirement for a vote'.

Labour leader Sir Keir Starmer last night joined the criticism.

He told the BBC: 'I have prosecuted many cases that have ended in a ten-year sentence and I know an empty threat when I see it.'

The new rules come in to force on Monday. Anyone who is found to have lied in order to avoid the quarantine could face prison in addition to an automatic £10,000 fine.

Transport Secretary Grant Shapps defended the policy, saying 'stiff sentences' were needed to deter people from breaking rules.