

European Tourism Convention – 12 October 2020

Statement by Ireland’s Minister for Tourism, Arts, Culture, the Gaeltacht, Sports and Media, Catherine Martin T.D.

I wish to express my thanks to the European Commission for organising this Tourism Convention which will no doubt assist us in developing and sharing further targeted responses to stimulate recovery and to identify ways to improve resiliency in the sector.

Since taking up the role of Minister of Tourism at the end of June, I have met with a variety of stakeholders across the wide spectrum of the Irish tourism industry, and it is patently clear that the Covid-19 pandemic has had a catastrophic and highly disruptive impact on the sector. It has abruptly ended business as usual for the tourism sector. Jobs have been lost and many more are under threat.

The COVID-19 crisis requires that we take proactive steps and co-ordinated policy actions in the immediate, short, medium and long-terms, to mitigate the impacts and to support the recovery of the sector. Policy interventions and investment will be needed to support competitiveness, digitalisation and the green transition. We also need to consider allowing the maximum flexibility possible in State Aids rules, to enable Member States provide timely and appropriate supports for tourism. The longer-term impacts of Covid-19 are as yet unclear and we must ensure our short term responses to the pandemic are consistent with our longer-term goals.

Making international travel safe again is one of our biggest and most immediate challenges. Overseas travel increases the risk of importing a higher incidence of the virus therefore we need to stay vigilant and follow public health advice. At the same time, international travel is vital the tourism sector and its safe resumption must be a priority for us all. In that regard a comprehensive, rapid test, track and isolate (TTI) system is key.

In tandem with the recommencement of international travel, restoring consumer confidence as regards travelling will be crucial. There is no question that the shape of the tourism industry that emerges from this crisis will be different than it was at the beginning of 2020. In the face of the fundamental changes facing our industry, we need a comprehensive understanding of the changed consumer and the new marketplace. Extensive research will be important to help identify when consumers are ready to consider holidaying again. Significant investment will then be required in international marketing and demand stimulation to kick start the recovery.

In May, a Tourism Recovery Taskforce was established in Ireland to prepare a Tourism Recovery Plan. It undertook a widespread stakeholder consultation process which yielded many ideas and inputs. Its final report includes a set of recommendations on how best the Irish Tourism sector can adapt and recover in a changed environment as a result of the crisis. In the context of framing Budget 2021 and our impending National Economic Plan, I look forward to reviewing the recommendations of the Taskforce with my colleagues in Government, as we consider the policy measures needed to facilitate sector growth in what will be a highly competitive and uniquely challenging environment for Irish tourism in a Post Covid-19 and Post Brexit world.

A fundamental challenge for all of us is to develop a new tourism model that will be less susceptible to the impacts of global events such as the current crisis. The Irish Government has committed to developing a Sustainable Tourism Policy, based on already agreed guiding principles, to ensure that the development of the Irish tourism sector reflects the highest standards of environmental, social and economic sustainability.

We encourage people to see Ireland as a long stay destination rather than just for weekends or short visits, thus helping tourists to reduce their carbon footprint by staying for longer.

Ireland is committed to reducing regionality by spreading tourism more evenly across the country and to reducing seasonality by promoting more breaks in the shoulder and off-season. We intend to develop and strengthen Ireland's image as

an outdoor activity holiday destination. We will develop a National Outdoor Recreation Strategy and will further invest in and promote an integrated national network of greenways and blueways and recreational trails for the benefit of local communities and tourists alike.

I look forward to engaging further with Member States and the Commission as we work together in framing policies that will underpin tourism's recovery throughout the entire EU over the next number of years.

Thank you.