



IRELAND'S ASSOCIATION FOR ADVENTURE TOURISM

15th March 2020

Dear Member,

As chairperson of the IAAT in these unprecedented times, I felt it important to share my own thoughts and experience in the hope that it may encourage all of us to hang in there and see out this period of uncertainty.

We are facing severe challenges to our industry and I know you are all suffering as a consequence of the COVID-19 virus. But let me start by being brutally honest; Things are going to get worse in the coming weeks before they get better. This is a scary thought, especially considering I have just laid off one staff member and put the other 4 team members on 3-day weeks due to the immediate impact this Virus has had on bookings. Additionally, 95% of all bookings have cancelled to the end of April and this may become 100% by tomorrow so you might ask how much worse it can get?

The honest answer is I don't know, and what's worse, it seems neither does anyone else. The reason I'm sitting at my kitchen table at the end of what has been the most unnerving week of my professional career and writing this, is to encourage you to stay positive. Let's not get sucked into the overwhelming negativity surrounding the issue.

Stepping back from the economic impact this virus is having on our industry, we need to remember that the steps that are being taken are to keep people safe and prevent further loss of life. There is no amount of bookings that will ever replace the loss of even one life. So let's try to keep everything in perspective.

We have been through similarly tough challenges in the past. Granted, not with the same level of impact in such a short timeframe. None-the-less we have ridden out storms before and we will do it again. Our industry is built on people making businesses from their passions, and nothing will take that passion away. This is what sets us apart from other industries and even other sectors within the tourism industry. We are creative and resilient. We make a living from dealing with the everchanging outdoor environment. Now we should apply this same mindset and skillset to overcome this challenge.

The IAAT is here to be the conduit between our members, relevant government bodies and NGOs. We are in constant contact with industry authorities from whom we will be seeking support during the Recovery phase. This includes lobbying government ministers and state organisations for supports to mitigate the crisis in the short term for you our members. With this in mind, we invite you to contact us with any issue and/or questions.

Finally, we need to help each other. We are a small industry on a small island, but we have always been a force to be reckoned with on the global stage. Irish adventure tourism can lead the way in dealing with the issue responsibly; while also being ready to capitalise when the time comes. We have always been a safe and healthy destination, and this again will be one of our trump cards when the inevitable bounce back happens.

Hang in there,
Maurice Whelan
Chairman, Ireland's Association For Adventure Tourism