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The Rt. Hon Dominic Rabb MP
Secretary of State for Foreign Home
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1st June 2020

Dear Home Secretary, Foreign Secretary

You will no doubt be aware of the concerns raised with your offices by many UK tour operators and hoteliers with regards to the proposed amendment to the Coronavirus Act 2020 allowing for a mandatory 14 day quarantine period to be implemented for any person(s) arriving at United Kingdom ports and airports of entry.

Recent media coverage has alluded to these concerns being primarily amongst so called “luxury” tour operators and hoteliers, thus implying that this may not be a universal concern to the vast majority of agents who sell travel related services for both consumers and businesses in the UK.

We wish to correct this impression and also outline a number of concerns that the British travel industry has around current government regulations.

Advantage Travel Partnership is the UK’s largest independent travel agent group, the leisure and business travel agents who are part of our partnership are each independently owned, but as a collective they produce over £4.5 billion of travel sales each year for the UK economy, making us, without doubt, the largest player of our type in the UK travel industry.

The BTA is the representative body and authority of the UK business travel industry and works collaboratively across the industry and with the government to promote the integral role of business travel and events to the wider economy. Our member travel management companies (TMCs) account for over 90% of all business travel booked in the UK. In a typical year this equates to 6.4 million journeys and 32 million transactions, contributing £220 billion to UK GDP.

The Specialist Travel Association (AITO, www.aito.com) was established in 1976 and comprises 120 of the best specialist tour operators in the UK generating £1bn of SME turnover. We also have circa 100 independent travel agents which are affiliated to AITO (known as AITO Specialist Travel Agents). Our tour operator members employ over 3,500 staff and carry in the region of 600,000 clients on holiday all over the world each year.

The Scottish Passenger Agents’ Association has been in existence for 99 years and has represented the outbound Scottish travel industry consistently throughout that time as the voice of the travel industry in Scotland with our members including all of Scotland’s retail and corporate travel agencies. Outbound travellers from Scotland are worth in excess of £1.7bn and this sector sustains more than 26K jobs with the number of passengers using Scottish Airports approaching 27 million.

HBAA represents 90 agency members who transact over £1 billion in the UK business events, accommodation and meetings sector, and on behalf of our 200 hotel, venue and serviced apartment members who work with them. All HBAA members are critically reliant on business tourism.

While we fully support, and appreciate, the need for the health and safety of British citizens, when travelling overseas on business or leisure, to be paramount in government considerations, we believe that the current strategies are too draconian, short sighted and not balanced and will, in effect, deeply damage the travel industry which contributes significantly to the UK economy in taxes, foreign exchange and employment.

As an organisation with such a key role and position in the travel industry we are keen to highlight three areas of concern to the sector and we call on you to reconsider and amend the proposed regulations and current advisory positions as a matter of urgency. Those three key areas of concern are:

1. The 14-day quarantine period for UK arrivals. This policy, we believe, is hugely damaging to both the UK inbound and outbound travel sector. The prospect of many British citizens having to self-quarantine after a holiday or a business travel trip will severely deter those wishing to travel. While we understand and appreciate the need for safety and establishing who has the virus and who is capable of spreading it, we believe that a robust track and trace system alongside measures identified by IATA through their multi layered restart approach would be much more effective for government strategy and less damaging to the UK travel industry.
2. Current Foreign and Commonwealth Office Travel Ban. We call for an immediate and urgent review of the current Foreign and Commonwealth Office blanket ban on travel, which is in place regardless of the status of the Covid-19 virus in destination countries. This sweeping ban makes the possibility of travel, even to countries deemed generally to be safe, prohibited and, again, causes untold damage to the UK outbound travel sector.
3. Establishment of Air Bridges with Countries Deemed Safe. We believe that the most responsible way to address the balance of easing the British citizen back safely to travelling for business or leisure, while at the same time facilitating the much needed recovery of the UK inbound and outbound travel sector, is through the quick establishment and utilisation of international air bridges between destinations deemed to be Covid-19 safe or free countries by both the UK and the corresponding foreign government. In this area we believe that we, through our members, could greatly assist your offices.

It is safe to say that the UK travel industry, which has undoubtedly been a world class showcase sector, as a profitable, successful and large contributor to the UK economy, and society in general, faces perilous times in the months ahead but, if the above actions are taken, we believe, the sector can recover and once again contribute to the health, financially and in mental wellbeing, to the UK economy specifically and the British people generally.

Yours sincerely,

Julia Lo Bue-Said, Chief Executive, The Advantage Travel Partnership;
Clive Wratten, Chief Executive, The Business Travel Association;
Bharat Gadhoke, Head of Commercial, AITO;
Joanne Dooley, President, SPAA and
Juliet Price, Consultant Executive Director, HBAA

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