

A good start for UK Accessible Tourism post lockdown

Survey of trips taken by disabled travellers and holidaymakers post lockdown - July and August 2020

Synopsis

A mini survey of disabled travellers and holiday makers shows a cautious return to travel and tourism in the period immediately after lockdown in the UK and indicates that, although coronavirus is still a key consideration, there is a willingness among this key group once again to enjoy a holiday or a day out in the UK.

The mini survey further indicates that, although disabled travellers and holiday makers are concerned over coronavirus and fully aware of the need for protection measures, the more 'traditional' concern of customer service, combined with staff training and awareness of disability and accessibility, remains the real key to attracting this group to take trips, breaks and holidays in the UK.

Main Findings

The main findings of the survey, which was completed by 38 disabled travellers and holidaymakers during August 2020, include:-

- Almost half of all people in this category have already taken a break or holiday in the first 4-6 weeks since lockdown eased.
- This figure would have risen to two thirds if issues of costs and availability could be solved.
- There was a wide range of destinations, from cities to coasts, with two thirds undertaking day trips but a good third spending from 1 to 7+ nights away.
- Car travel (own or rented) was the most popular method of travel, but almost 40% were happy to use public transport.
- Accessibility, customer service and staff training remain as important as cleaning and coronavirus protection measures in attracting this group to travel and visit.

Conclusion

Despite their accessibility issues and their real concern over coronavirus, almost half of this group chose to travel and holiday in the UK in the first 4 - 6 weeks since the UK started to emerge from lockdown, indicating that this sector is keen to take trips and holidays if businesses meet their needs. Coronavirus protection measures are obviously important to this group, but no more so than accessibility and overall staff awareness and training in helping them to enjoy their trip, break or holiday. And there is clear evidence that businesses are responding to their needs and gaining both praise and income from a domestic sector worth £14.8 billion per year.

Survey Details

Background/ methodology

The mini survey was carried out during August amongst active disabled travellers and holiday makers, who are either members or supporters of the charity Tourism for All, which supports and promotes accessible travel and tourism in the UK.

38 adults completed the mini survey on what holiday activity, if any, they had undertaken in the first 4 - 6 weeks since lockdown in the UK had begun to ease from July onwards. The mini survey asked about their destinations and their methods and times of travel, as well as their experiences and opinions of how well the UK tourist industry provided for their needs as well as satisfying coronavirus safety and protection measures for what is one of the country's most at risk groups.

The survey panel was made up of Tourism for All members and supporters across the UK. The group all had a self-declared disability or health condition that impacted on their holiday and travel activities, but all undertook, or wished to undertake, travel and tourism activities. The group represented both visible and hidden disabilities, with a large majority (74%) declaring mobility impairment as their main disability. This was reflected in the age range of the respondents to the mini survey, with 52% of the respondents in the 65 plus category and the other 48% evenly split between the other age ranges from 25 – 64. This age profile reflects overall disability in the UK, where many people acquire disabilities as they age.

Holidays and trips taken in the UK immediately post lockdown

The group were asked "*How many trips have you taken in the UK since 1st July?*". Those who had taken one or more trips were then asked, about the trip they had most enjoyed, "*Where did you go?*", "*What sort of place(s) did you visit?*", "*How long was your trip?*", "*How long did you travel?*" and "*What method of transport did use to get to your destination?*".

Here the group were pretty evenly split between those who had undertaken a trip (47%) and those who had not (53%). Considering the mini survey was conducted just four weeks after lockdown began to ease, with many venues and accommodation not yet open, this level of trips taken almost immediately post lockdown was relatively high. Of those who had taken trips, 15% had taken 3 or more trips in this short period, with 85% limiting themselves to one or two trips.

Destinations visited revealed some surprising information. Tourism for All's previous survey, carried out during lockdown, indicated that travellers' first choice post lockdown would be countryside and national parks, with cities and towns, historically their first choice, falling to fourth place.

Cities and towns prove popular. In reality, however, cities and towns came back to first slot, with 32% of all trips, while countryside / national parks and the seaside ranked joint second, at 20% each. This change of attitude may well be a direct reflection of people's confidence that coronavirus precautions and health measures are being successfully implemented by the businesses and destinations visited.

Historic houses and theme parks lose out. As expected, historic houses / castles (4%) and theme parks (0%) directly reflected the lack of open locations in these sectors in the period, particularly National Trust properties. Previously, 38% of disabled travellers went to historic houses and castles and the continued closure of such properties in the period may be one of the causes of some people choosing not to travel or undertake day trips.

For just a day or a longer stay? Again some surprising results. As expected with people trying out travel in this period, day trips were the most popular excursion, reflecting concerns about both coronavirus and the accessibility issues that already prevent many of this group from undertaking overnight stays.

However, although day trips accounted for 66% of the total trips taken, a significant minority (34%) stayed overnight, with 20% enjoying a 7 night or more holiday and 14% a 1-6 night break. This again reflects that both coronavirus protection measures and accessibility issues need to be

addressed by the UK tourism industry and that those businesses who do this stand to gain long stay customers from a group that has £14.8 billion spending power in the UK economy.

Time travelled - how long to get there? As expected with day trips, travel time is limited and 66% of the respondents travelled up to 2 hours to their destination – directly in line with day trip numbers. Of the remainder, however, 20% were happy to travel up to four hours, with a dedicated 14% travelling for up to 8 hours plus – reflecting Tourism for All's previous survey, where “as long as it takes” was a frequent response to the question about acceptable travel times. As accessibility, particularly of toilets, is a key issue for this group, this again is a positive reflection of how some businesses provide accessible facilities that support such travel times.

And mode of transport? Exactly how you travel has become a real issue in a pandemic situation, with concerns expressed in lockdown about the risks of public transport, and it would be expected that to travel in your own car would be the top option. It was, **BUT** at 44% it was not as high a percentage as expected. A further 18% chose to rent a car or to be a passenger in another's car, but 25% were happy to travel by train and a further 13% by bus, indicating some change of attitude toward the risks associated with public transport, especially for a group with so high a proportion of mobility impairment – who traditionally experience major difficulties with public transport! Interestingly, no one had chosen coach as a travel option, perhaps reflecting the lack of availability of coach based trips and holidays in the current situation.

The effect of the coronavirus pandemic on holiday trips. What measures are important for this group.

At the heart of the mini survey were two questions that addressed the steps taken to ensure the holiday was safe and that disabled travellers were welcomed. The first question was *“Thinking of the trip that you enjoyed the most, what were the steps that the destination and businesses took that made you feel safe and welcome and helped you to enjoy your trip?”*

For this question, respondents had a list of options they could select and the facility to enter details of concerns and steps which were not listed. Of the options listed, 46 were marked, the largest response to an individual question in the survey.

As expected, *“Detailed information on procedures being followed to keep customers safe from coronavirus”* (19%) and *“Detailed information on the cleaning regime”* (15%) were the top choices, but not by a significant margin over other options. **In equal second place (15%) was “Staff knowledge of accessibility”**, followed closely by *“Staff training and awareness in coronavirus measures”* (14%) and *“Staff were trained to welcome customers with access requirements”* (13%). **In fact, steps taken to cover issues of access and disability were as important, at 50% of all reasons given, as all the measures concerning coronavirus safety and protection (also 50%).**

This bears significant similarities to Tourism for All's previous survey, carried out during lockdown, where “accessibility of accommodation and places” and “disability awareness” were the key factors for customers in this sector.

This new result reflects the fact that accessibility and staff awareness / training now go hand in hand with safety and protection measures, on an equal footing, to ensure a successful holiday outcome for this group.

Businesses have stepped up to the mark!

A very positive result came from the second key question *“Thinking of all the trips that you have taken, what is the most important single thing that destinations and businesses could have done better to make you feel safe and welcome and to help you to enjoy your trip?”*

It was expected that this question would produce a list of “can do better” options, but again, it yielded a surprising result - over half of all responses (54%) stated that nothing extra needed to be done, with multiple positive responses to the efforts of staff and businesses:

They went out of their way to be helpful. Giving us menus earlier before the meal so we could order and save time once seated!

I had a very positive experience, all were helpful they were very keen to get me into the shop

ALL WAS AS EXPECTED AND WENT WELL (respondent's capital letters)

Nothing - I felt safe all the time

The most frequent suggestions for improvement (31%) focussed on accessibility issues – and how improvements could help turn day trippers into overnight guests - and staff friendliness and awareness.

And what about those who didn't travel?

Our final questions were for those who said they had not travelled. Again we asked for reasons why. As would be expected at this time, “*Concern over coronavirus*” was the top response, but considering that this group is at higher risk than the general population, with greater numbers shielding, the response of 65% was actually not as high as originally expected. Cost and availability of money was quoted by 20% of respondents, reflecting both worries in the economy and the potential costs of a staycation holiday. For the remaining 15%, lack of choice and availability of suitable accommodation was key. This element has not changed, with up to a third of the “no travel” respondents potentially willing to travel if problems of costs, income and availability were solved.

Conclusion

It is clear that this group, despite real concerns over coronavirus, have already - within 4 - 6 weeks of lockdown starting to ease - started to return to travel and holidays, and that those who have travelled were impressed and encouraged by what businesses are doing to mitigate the virus. As confidence in coronavirus protection measures grows, more of this group will be willing to consider taking trips, breaks and holidays in the UK. However, accessibility provision and awareness, particularly amongst staff, will be crucial to secure their business and bookings.

S.W. Dunn – September 2020