

The future of pubs, hotels and tourist attractions

As the lock down drags on, so the summer season will rush by. We need to ask what does the future hold for those who have invested their lives and savings in small hotels, B and Bs, pubs, clubs, tourist shops and attractions.

If the climate remains hostile to larger gatherings of people for July and August as well as May and June, the summer season will be badly damaged for these supporting businesses. In areas of great beauty or historical interest small businesses depend heavily on the summer income to see them through winters of low volumes or partial closures. Visitor numbers are often driven by access to festivals, sporting events, great houses open to the public and magnificent scenery which is best in sunshine.

It is possible for many of these businesses to survive for the time being. They can put their staff on furlough. They can get some delay on taxes and rent. What they cannot do is go a whole year without the higher revenues of summer. They need a clearer picture of what July and August might bring, when government is cautious as it depends on success with limiting the spread of the disease.

It is also a question of what business model can these enterprises come up with to be compliant in an age of social distancing. How realistic is it to run a restaurant with 2 metres between diners? Can screens be used instead? How do people get served drinks in a pub without a jostle at the bar? How many people can a small hotel or B and B handle whilst keeping people apart and keeping common areas free of virus from the occasional infected person who is unaware of their condition?

The long decline of the High Street will be accelerated by recent events. So might we end up with fewer pubs and fewer tourist businesses. How long can a firm keep workers in furlough before there has to be revenue earning employment or redundancy?

I would be interested to know how you would respond to some relaxation in these areas? Would you go to a pub or restaurant if they opened soon? What changes would you want them to make to handle the virus? Would you consider a week-end break or a holiday somewhere in England later this summer?