



NORTHERN
IRELAND
HOTELS
FEDERATION

NIHF COMMENTARY STATEMENT – 5st June 2020

Summer is Coming or is it?

Northern Ireland Hotels Federation (NIHF) CEO Janice Gault writes:

“They say a week is a long time in Politics. If the past week is anything to go by, it’s a very long time indeed as every hour appears to bring new science, increased freedom and the relaxation of lockdown restrictions.

Having lobbied long and hard for a tourism timeline, Monday 1st June saw a real breakthrough as a lockdown date of 20th July was announced for the accommodation sector. Hotels would be allowed to open with the Northern Ireland Executive keen to explore what additional services could be safely opened to support and enhance the hotel guests experience.

Since then we have reached out to hoteliers to ascertain what will work for the sector and how we return to viable trading. Their positivity and tenacity is to be applauded. Opening will be a challenge for many and choice is key. A significant number see the summer season as critical; others wish to return in a staged manner awaiting further guidance on social distancing and trading restrictions.

As an industry, we have been working on guidelines which will support local Hospitality and Tourism businesses. The task has been a mammoth one which has included industry, government, trade unions and health sectors. It’s important that this process is inclusive and that the result is a framework that is workable and one which offers reassurance to staff and customers alike.

The onset of the Coronavirus was swift and dramatic. Exiting from the resulting lockdown has proved to be not without its own drama. Countries like France and Italy have moved quickly from strict lockdown to liberation. Public confidence has grown as the pandemic subsides, with the dread of social engagement being outpaced by the urge to reconnect and meet up again.

Ireland is an island. This has served us well in the fight against the virus. Last week, an opening date of 20th July aligned us with the lockdown in the Republic of Ireland. A great step forward! However, this all changed as the south announced a revised route to recovery which will see hotels and a significant part of the tourism and hospitality sector reopen on the 29th June.

Another interesting week awaits, as we ponder on what is best for Northern Ireland’s economic recovery. We must stay safe but we can’t stand still. Summer is upon us but a big cloud still looms over our future. In a destination which is synonymous with Game of Thrones, the ominous phrase “winter is coming” brings a real sense of foreboding particularly in Northern Ireland, if summer never comes! “