



UKINBOUND

THE VOICE OF INBOUND TOURISM

Guidance for Handling Tour Groups

Currently guidance (and changes to guidance) on Covid-19 is being produced almost on a daily basis by the UK Government (and Governments worldwide). However, whilst there is a substantial amount of information available that includes how to social distance effectively inside and outside buildings and on passenger transport – there is currently no central place where those who specialise in the travel of small and large groups can view current guidance to ensure the health and wellbeing of their clients.

UKinbound has therefore pulled together links to existing guidance (and liaised with key Government Departments to obtain further information) which aims to provide some answers to the most common questions raised by members. To be aware however that whilst UKinbound will endeavour to keep this document updated with details of the latest guidance, operators should always double check the latest information on gov.uk - the Association cannot be held liable for group travel arrangements within the UK.

General

ETOA (The European Tour Operator Association) has produced some short, general guidelines for tour operators that are available to view [here](#).

Travelling to and within the UK

The Department for Transport (DfT) has confirmed that coaches travelling into the UK should follow the Safer Travel guidance for [passengers](#) and [operators](#). For England, this sets out that operators should maintain 2 metres distance where possible, and where this is not possible, the risk should be reduced by maintaining a 1 metre distance and taking suitable mitigations including face coverings and increased hand washing/hand sanitiser.

The guidance is the same for [Wales](#) albeit vehicles are classed as premises (face coverings are mandatory). Anyone operating tours or visits around Wales will need to ensure that they and their clients comply with the latest* [Health Protection \(Coronavirus Restrictions\) \(No. 2\) \(Wales\) Regulations 2020](#) and [guidance for tourism and hospitality businesses for a phased and safe re-opening](#). This must include a full risk assessment and consideration of all requirements including (but not limited to) [social/physical distancing](#) and their [Test, Trace, Protect](#) approach. In respect of transport, coach operators should follow the guidance that applies to [public transport operators](#) and ensure that they have undertaken a full risk assessment.

Coach tour operators should also be aware of Welsh Government policy on [contact tracing](#) and the potential implications of a coach tour passenger developing symptoms and testing positive for COVID-19 whilst on a tour to Wales. More specifically, a coach tour operator should be operating as safe an environment as possible on the coach itself, and as a party travelling together. They should consider the risk of the whole coach party needing to self-isolate if someone develops COVID-19

symptoms. Where no social distancing and other mitigating measures have been put into place the whole party will be treated as a 'household' and will need to follow the [self-isolation guidance](#).

Coach operators should also understand the key factors that will be taken into account by the NHS Wales Test, Trace, Protect service in identifying contacts of an individual who has tested positive for COVID-19. More information is available [here](#).

The situation in [Scotland](#) is broadly similar to that in England and Wales. Face coverings are mandatory and the advised 2 metre physical distancing requirement can be reduced to 1 metre only where appropriate mitigation measures have been put in place. Coach operators, whether they are Scottish, British or international, need to follow Transport Scotland's [guidance for transport operators](#) in that they will need to undertake a risk assessment with workforce engagement to establish what mitigation measures they need to put in place to enable them to operate safely with 1 metre physical distancing on their coaches.

DfT have also confirmed that in terms of entering and leaving the UK, there is no limit on the number of passengers in a vehicle, although adhering to the guidelines will of course limit capacity. Whilst DfT are keen to encourage all coach operators to follow the Government's social distancing guidance, they will not be refusing coaches entry at the border due to lack of compliance with the guidance.

To be aware that if a group plans to travel to the UK by ferry, please check with the ferry company you intend to use before travelling as some companies have imposed limits of 25 people on coaches and some have refused coaches altogether.

What is the maximum size for a tour group?

The latest advice on group sizes can be found [here](#) although this may vary if there are any [local lockdown restrictions](#) in place in the UK.

For England, current guidance states that it is against the law for gatherings of more than 30 people to take place in private homes (including gardens and other outdoor spaces). However, businesses and venues following Covid-19 secure guidelines can host larger groups. This is also the case for events in public outdoor spaces that are organised by businesses, charitable or political organisations, and public bodies, provided they take reasonable steps to mitigate the risk of transmission, in line with Covid-19 secure guidance and including completion of a risk assessment.

The advice is the same currently in Wales. The [Health Protection \(Coronavirus Restrictions\) \(No. 2\) \(Wales\) Regulations 2020](#) limit any organised group outdoors to 30 people in total (including organiser/driver/guide etc) provided certain measures are in place; this can include a mix of households (not limited to the same/extended household) as long as social distancing/other mitigations are put in place. The regulations do not currently allow indoor group visits, guided tours, events and other public programmes such as schools programmes and family learning events indoors. Gatherings of up to 30 people can take place outdoors for organised activities, when supervised by a responsible person, and where a risk assessment has been undertaken. All activities will need to be assessed for risk and viability in line with public health guidance.

To be aware that all those responsible for looking after and managing groups will need to take into account the different policies and capacity levels at hotels, attractions, bars, restaurants and events etc. We have been made aware that some hotels are not taking groups at the moment, partly for logistical reasons but also due to the potential risk of having to deal with a group having to self-isolate at the hotel due to a suspected Covid-19 case. We also understand that some tour guides are

putting strict limits on the number of guests they can guide and that some attractions have opened for individuals but are not as yet accepting group bookings.

How many people can a tour guide have?

The [Visitor Economy guidance](#) for England has been updated. This states that in England, guided tours of up to 30 people may take place indoors or outdoors provided businesses undertake risk assessments in line with the guidance and put any necessary mitigations in place.

Should tour guides ask for group contact details for the Track and Trace Scheme?

The British Guild of Tourist Guides have informed us that if taking a group on a tour, guides will take contact details from the tour leader only but will take contact details from each person if they are taking individuals on a tour.

Current guidance notes can be found [here](#).

What if someone in the group falls ill with Covid-19? What is the process?

The Government are yet to confirm official advice on how to best handle Covid-19 infection/symptoms when a group is travelling by coach however tentative advice at this stage is that it is likely that the whole group would be asked to self-isolate in case of an infection. This advice could change if and when tests with immediate results become available.

To mitigate against this possibility, those responsible for organising group travel should make sure that all passengers are healthy before travelling, and not to take any risks whilst travelling.

If a group has to self isolate – then they should follow the current advice that is available for [accommodation providers](#) (please also check the latest guidance for [Scotland](#), [Wales](#) and [Northern Ireland](#)). This states that if a person does show symptoms of Covid-19 and the person can travel home safely, without the use of public transport, they should do so. If they are unable to do this, and their accommodation is the safest place - then they should isolate there. The visitor would be liable for costs of an extended stay.

If it's not possible to remain in the accommodation for the duration of the isolation period e.g. because the accommodation is booked for future guests, and they can't find other accommodation themselves with support from friends or family, the person should discuss this with the NHS Test and Protect team.

There's assistance available for those who may need help to isolate via the National Assistance Helpline on 0800 111 4000. This helpline routes the person through to the local authority support team who, in discussion with the individual and the local health protection team, will help identify alternative isolation accommodation.

We recognise that the current advice is not particularly group friendly and is high risk for tour operators. If group travel is to take place, then please ensure that there is adequate insurance in place and guests fully understand any liability issues.

What will happen if an international guest staying at accommodation develops COVID-19 symptoms?

As it would not be safe for an international guest with COVID-19 symptoms to travel home whilst experiencing symptoms, they should stay at the accommodation and immediately [apply for a free COVID-19 antigen test](#) from the accommodation, and follow the [self-isolation guidance](#).

If they become very unwell and feel they cannot cope with their symptoms, inform them to use the [111 online coronavirus service](#). If you do not have internet access, call 111. In a medical emergency, dial 999.

If they receive a negative test result then they no longer need to self-isolate and can return home as they wish / or on completion of their stay. If they receive a positive COVID-19 test whilst staying at accommodation, then they must continue to self-isolate and follow the [contact tracing guidance](#) that will be provided directly to them by the NHS Test, Trace, Protect service. The service will contact them as soon as they receive a positive test, and will also contact the accommodation provider if there is a suspected outbreak on the premises (i.e. more than one confirmed case).

You should be aware of the risk associated with accepting bookings from international customers should they develop COVID-19 symptoms during their stay, given they may* not be able to vacate accommodation until they receive a negative test or their self-isolation period is complete.

*You will need to consider this as part of your risk assessments and the potential mitigations you might put in place, such as leaving additional buffer-space between bookings. Again, the cost factor and your associated booking policy needs to be clearly communicated with your potential customers in advance of accepting bookings.

Other requirements for international visitors

All travellers to the UK have to complete a [Public Health Passenger Locator Registration Form](#) 48 hours before travelling. If you think that this may present difficulties, please let us know.

What about group sizes when travelling by train in the UK?

Avanti West Coast have provided us with the following information for groups when travelling on their trains.

Groups will be expected to socially distance on trains with the exception of those travelling from the same household. Avanti West Coast's group travel team will organise socially distanced seat reservations.

All passengers travelling in England, Wales or Scotland must wear face coverings onboard. Face coverings are compulsory at stations in England and are strongly recommended at stations in Scotland & Wales. They are not compulsory for those that cannot wear them for medical reasons.

Avanti West Coast are advising groups of 10+ to travel on individual tickets as opposed to one group ticket to allow for full social distancing. If a group of 10+ is travelling in First Class and wishes to use one of the First Class Lounges, please notify the groups team when making the booking so they can reserve an area in advance (subject to availability).

For the latest information on travelling with [Avanti West Coast](#), click here and to book group travel click [here](#).