

Minister Martin's keynote address at Fáilte Ireland's Survive to Thrive industry event, 1st February 2021

From [Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media](#)

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Thank you for that introduction, Paul.

Good morning everybody and welcome to Fáilte Ireland's Virtual Industry Event - 'Survive to Thrive'. I would like to thank Fáilte Ireland for inviting me to speak at the launch of their Business Plans. I am aware that this event is attended by a large number of representatives, right across the industry who are looking for some light at the end of a very dark tunnel.

A little later on, Fáilte Ireland will share details of their plans to support the industry in 2021, a crucial year for the recovery of the Tourism Industry. Similar to the "Survive to Thrive" theme of today's event, "Resilience and Recovery" is the focus of the Government's plans.

This year's plans will be quite different to those of previous years. The economic and competitive context that tourism is and will be operating in has fundamentally changed because of COVID. In addition, the impact of Brexit on our tourism sector may not become apparent for some time.

COVID-19 has had a devastating impact on tourism nationwide. I also acknowledge that the further public health measures necessary to March will be very challenging for the tourism sector. Nonetheless, the roll-out of a national vaccination programme is a welcome development and provides hope that in 2021 we will see the beginning of the recovery for the sector but this will not happen overnight.

As regards inbound tourism, while tighter travel restrictions have recently been put in place, I want to assure you that the Government will make every effort to facilitate inbound tourism at the earliest possible opportunity, when it is safe to so. Research from Tourism Ireland indicates that tourists want to return to Ireland when the time is right and we will be ready to capitalise on the recovery, and quickly, when it comes.

I am well aware that tourism businesses are struggling greatly in this current climate. I know many of you are experiencing severe personal and financial hardship. Recovery will be difficult and I know that a number of you are struggling to retain skilled staff at this time. While we do not have all the solutions at present, the Government and Fáilte Ireland has

implemented a number of measures to alleviate some of the stresses currently being experienced by tourism businesses.

In Budget 2021, the Government provided a significant package of tax and fiscal measures to build the resilience of the economy and to help vulnerable but viable businesses across all sectors including tourism. I also secured a €221 million allocation for tourism – to be channelled through Fáilte Ireland and also Tourism Ireland. Investment in the Overseas Tourism Marketing Fund was also maintained to ensure that we can move quickly to promote Ireland when it is safe for tourists to travel to our shores again.

Tourism enterprises have benefited from supports such as the COVID Resilience Support Scheme, the VAT reduction, the rates waiver and tourism specific schemes. I know the crucial role that these extraordinary measures have played in ensuring survival for our sector. Indeed I understand that tourism and hospitality businesses account for approximately two thirds of the payments under the CRSS or €114 million.

I also note that certainty about the future on any issue is in very short supply and while there has been broad welcome from the sector for supports like CESS and EWSS, I am aware that there is anxiety about how long they will be available. So I want you all to know that after my discussions with him, the Minister for Finance has provided assurances that the Government will continue to support the sector in the long term, through recovery and reopening. There will be no cliff-edge ending to these supports. And we are assessing the effectiveness of continued supports and of course how new ones may help.

However, I am fully aware that not all tourism businesses have received benefits and some gaps remain. This is why I was happy to secure the €55m Fund for a Business Continuity Scheme in Budget 2021 for strategic tourism businesses, to be administered by Fáilte Ireland. The aim is to help those strategically important tourism businesses that are ineligible for other supports, to withstand the impact of COVID-19.

Later on this morning, Fáilte Ireland will give more details around the eligibility criteria and times lines and the level of grants for this scheme. The Scheme will contribute to the fixed costs of identified tourism businesses that are not eligible for CRSS to support their survival. It will provide an equitable level of payment to the CRSS for qualified businesses. Businesses such as tourism attractions, activity providers, caravan and camping sites and others that don't qualify for CRSS will be covered by this scheme.

The Government will continue to assess the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the economy and ensure that appropriate supports are in place to mitigate these effects. We need to understand the new future we are operating in. We are now developing Tourism for survival through the Pandemic and recovery in the medium and long term. That is why the Recovery Plan submitted to me by the Tourism Recovery Taskforce is so important.

The Plan was a key consideration in identifying the measures adopted to support the sector in the Budget. This will continue to be the case as we evaluate ongoing policy considerations to help the sector survive and recover. You will be aware that I appointed a Recovery Oversight Group in December to oversee the implementation of the Plan and monitor the sector's recovery. That Group has already met twice and I expect it will report to me with an update in the coming weeks.

It is vital that we support the survival of tourism businesses and maximise the number of sustainable tourism jobs. I recognise that tourism businesses face a significant challenge in retaining and acquiring staff with the appropriate skills.

Fáilte Ireland will this morning outline how they can best help the tourism sector to survive in 2021 and recover in order to maximise the long term sustainable economic, social, cultural and environmental contribution of tourism to Ireland.

I would like to thank Paul Kelly and the Fáilte Ireland team for their very hard work throughout a very difficult year in 2020 and for preparing their plans for 2021, as they stand ready, willing and able to assist our tourism businesses survive and thrive.

Tourism has faced and overcome many challenges in the past such as the Ash Cloud, the Financial Collapse in 2008, Foot and Mouth and SARs. And this time, we will again. In addition to the extreme financial stress, the physical and mental toll on businesses and employees has been unprecedented. But through these extraordinarily challenging and difficult times, I am confident that – with the strong support of Government working with the industry – we are resilient enough to overcome the challenges ahead. We can and will get our tourism industry back to be vibrant, sustainable and safe again, as it was in the past.

Fáilte Ireland's action plans for 2021 are key to helping the industry to survive and thrive in the year ahead.

Thank you and I hope that you will find today informative and helpful.