

## **Covid-19 : FAQs regarding the impact on travel and tourism in rural areas**

Legislation and Government guidance now limits peoples' ability to leave home during the lockdown to prevent the spread of the virus and limit pressure on local NHS services.

As the restrictions include urban residents visiting a second home often situated in rural areas of the country, or indeed anyone travelling to those areas, there is a significant impact on those who rely on these visitors for their local economy.

Furthermore, the initial flow of people travelling to rural areas raised concerns about how restricted local health services would cope if visitors became ill. Guidance was therefore introduced to protect and support rural areas during the lockdown.

### **Are people permitted to visit a second home during the lockdown?**

No. Government guidance states that visiting a second home is not essential, whether for self-isolation or for a holiday, and that people should remain in their primary residence.

There has been an increasing number of reports in the media about celebrities and second home owners travelling to their rural retreats in order to self-isolate. Catherine Calderwood, Scotland's Chief Medical Officer, has resigned following a police warning for visiting her second home. Therefore people who flout the law and the guidance do so at their peril.

### **What about people considering camping in the country as a means of social distancing given it's away from other people?**

No. Visits to campsites and caravans could have a damaging effect on already fragile rural communities.

At the start of the lockdown droves of campervans headed to the Scottish Highlands, in response to which Kate Forbes MSP, who represents Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch, pleaded with visitors:

*"If you live elsewhere, please don't use the Highlands as your means of self-isolation. People live here who are trying to follow government guidance and the continuing flow of campervans and other traffic who appear to be escaping the cities is not helping".*

Scottish campsites and caravan and holiday parks are now closed other than to those who live there as their primary residence.

### **What support is available for holiday accommodation businesses?**

As tourism secretary Fiona Hyslop has confirmed that anyone who has booked a holiday cottage or a rural getaway should "stay put", the Scottish tourism industry will undoubtedly be hit hard.

Originally the grants offered to businesses suffering from the effects of lockdown specifically excluded self-catering premises, however, the Government is now offering grants to certain self-catering businesses.

To determine whether or not a holiday accommodation business qualifies, visit this site:

<https://www.assc.co.uk/government-support-for-furnished-holiday-lets/>.

## **What are the current travel restrictions to and from the Scottish islands?**

Nicola Sturgeon, the First Minister, has announced that people are no longer to take ferries to the islands and that all hotels, B&Bs and self-catering properties should only be housing staff and essential workers.

This is to avoid rural and island hospitals being overwhelmed if people continue to visit rural areas and fall ill.

### ***Ferries***

CalMac has introduced an essential lifeline timetable which offers a reduced service for essential travel only. Northlink ferries are also operating a reduced timetable for essential travel only.

Ferry travel is only available to those who live on the islands and need to travel to and from the mainland.

### ***Flights***

Loganair which serves many Scottish islands has confirmed that travel before 4 May is limited to those who need to travel and again you may be asked for confirmation of your reason for travelling.

### ***Trains***

Local and national train and bus services continue to run but on reduced timetables to allow key workers to reach their place of work. Travel other than for keyworkers or shopping for essentials is not deemed essential.

## **What is classed as essential travel?**

Details can be found at: <https://www.calmac.co.uk/faqs/covid19/essential-travel>.

Travellers will be asked to provide evidence of residence in the form of a utility bill and confirm why travel is required.

## **What is the situation regarding people seeking refunds for pre-booked holiday accommodation?**

Those with existing bookings for accommodation on the Scottish islands or elsewhere in rural Scotland who are now unable to travel due to the current restrictions will be hoping for refunds for upfront payments. Whether you can otherwise seek a full refund will depend on the specific arrangement and terms and conditions with the property owner/ holiday let company.



Many self-catering holiday providers are offering the ability to amend the date of your booking without the need to cancel and seek a refund. In the absence of a refund it may also be possible to get compensation through your travel insurance or credit card.

If you are unsure on your rights during these unprecedented times please contact one of our [Rural services team](#) who will be happy to assist.

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