

VisitBritain CEO Patricia Yates speech notes from her presentation at UKinbound's 2023 Conference in Belfast on 20 September 2023.

Please also see the accompanying presentation for the relevant slides.

Thank you for inviting me back! It's a pleasure to be with you all here today. At last year's UKinbound conference, I spoke about how I wanted to transform the British Tourist Authority (BTA) as CEO and to spend more time listening and learning from industry and responding to your concerns.

- At times, it has meant listening to hard truths, but we have taken this feedback on board, improving how we work with and for you all.
- For example, we continue to strengthen our relationship with UKinbound, collaborating on events including World Travel Market and Showcase Britain and with Louise Bryce, our new Partnership Director, on the Board.
- We are working more closely with industry as we develop our marketing and have established a Sales and Marketing Advisory Board, which has been running for almost a year.
- We have heard your concerns about content and are restructuring the content team to ensure that we deliver imagery for businesses as well as consumers.
- We have reformed the British Tourism Industry Group – a small group of critical friends where we can have frank discussions about our focus and impact.
- And our Government Advisory role has been closely focused on areas that are front of mind for the industry: producing research on the impact of the loss of ID cards; introduction of ETAs and tax free shopping; and introduced and MPs on the DCMS Select Committee to South Koreans about to come to Britain on the Youth Mobility Scheme to support the call for the expansion of the scheme to Europe.

So, I hope you agree we are moving in the right direction. I have got a great team of directors – Louise Bryce and Gavin Landry are here today and we are all committed to ensuring we look outwards, listen, engage and form partnerships wherever we can.

[Slide 4] So speaking of research – what do the numbers look like - how is inbound tourism performing and what opportunities and challenges are facing the industry? The chart on slide 4 shows the trajectory for visitor and spend recovery. We are forecasting a record spend of £30.9 billion, exceeding 2019 levels in nominal terms. And at the start of the year spend was up by 17%, about back to 2019 levels adjusted for inflation – driven by longer stays and higher spend per visit.

The outlier at the top end is of course the US – now a £6 billion pound market for the UK with value growing by more than 40% a year and even adjusted for inflation, 26% growth.

[Slide 5] When you look at flight bookings, it is very clear the US is driving growth and North East Asia the laggard though picking up markedly since the re-opening of the China market

- Pre-COVID, China was our second most valuable market so its recovery is important for tourism growth.
- We are hopeful that numbers will continue to pick up with the great news that the UK is back on the approved destination list for Chinese visitors – so tour operators in China can sell group travel to Britain.

[Slide 6] While air capacity to the UK for September to November 2023 is overall very similar to levels from the same period in 2019, there is huge variation within those figures.

- You can see that Saudi Arabia, Turkey and India are markedly higher than 2019 capacity levels, while South Korea and Hong Kong are almost a third lower.

[Slide 7] Unsurprisingly, in light of rising economic concerns across the world, we are seeing value for money is one of the key global drivers of destination choice.

- Followed by welcome.

- How does Britain perform against these drivers? We have always been mid-ranking for welcome but we are now not seen as good value for money.
- However, the perception of Britain of convenience, value for money, good to visit at any time of year and welcome are much stronger amongst visitors who have been to Britain compared to those who have not visited.

[Slide 9] I want to also give you with an update on the BTA and our organisation. I'm proud to say that VisitBritain is a high-performing Arms Length Body, driving economic growth for Britain. From April 2021 – June 2022, we generated £673 million in additional visitor spend across the nations and regions of Britain.

[Slide 10] Since I became CEO last year, our vision has evolved - to drive a thriving tourism industry creating economic prosperity across Britain.

To achieve this we will:

- Work jointly with all of you building our partnership engagement to position Britain and England as diverse and accessible destinations. As I have already said, my team and I will be out there meeting with you and using these conversations to inform decision making.
- We will use data and digital systems to innovate, adapt and improve - making sure we are delivering timely data that enables better investment decisions in real time.
- Many of you have praised the teams you work with, particularly our overseas teams. We want to leverage all that talent and work as a global team, which is outwardly focused and learning from others.

[Slide 11] We are delivering this transformation programme in the face of tricky external factors, both for the BTA and the wider sector.

- You will be aware of the pressures that the increased cost of living is having both on the demand and supply side.
- We are competing against the Schengen VISA, which is cheaper for access to more countries – particularly challenging now, as people are more conscious of costs.
- As MPs look towards the General Election next year, how can tourism get on the political agenda and into party manifestos.
- Regional spread remains an ongoing issue with inbound visitors heavily weighted toward London. We know that those influenced by our GREAT campaigns spend 64% of their nights outside of London, compared to 47% of those not influenced by the campaign, but there is more that we can do.
- Finally, there is the challenge of urgency. Britain is a bucket list destination for many, somewhere they want to visit someday. We need to inspire visitors to book that trip today.

[Slide 12] Our VisitEngland team has been leading an exciting piece of work delivering on the recommendations of the DMO Review to transform the English tourism landscape to maximise investment and visitor numbers to every part of England.

- Since launching the National Local Visitor Economy Partnership (LVEP) application process, I'm pleased to announce that 22 LVEPs have been accredited.
- Our England team has also been busy expanding our business support helping businesses sell internationally and building skills in digital, sustainability and accessibility.

[Slide 13] One of our core objectives is to rebuild inbound value. There are three strands to our work positioning Britain as an exciting and diverse destination to visit now.

- We are connecting British suppliers and top buyers through familiarisation visits and trade missions such as our recent Destination Britain North America trade event.
- We are inspiring visitors to book their trips across Britain with our GREAT-funded marketing campaigns.

- We work closely with commercial partners including British Airways in the US and Wego in the GCC and the new marketing co-op we have piloted in the US to give businesses a lower entry point, to convert this inspiration into bookings.

[Slide 14] You can see some great examples of our campaigns in action around the world.

[Slide 15] Looking towards autumn and beyond, we will be launching the next phase of our 'Spill the Tea' campaign in France, Germany and the GCC, driving consideration and bookings during the shoulder season. We will also be launching new phases of our British Airways partnership in the US and our marketing co-op with industry.

[Slide 17] We know from our recent industry survey that our overseas missions and events programme is one of the areas where we add the most value to you and it remains a key part of our strategy.

- They are all about delivering business wins for you and driving seasonal and regional impacts across the country.
- We are listening to your feedback about how we can continue to adapt and improve our offering to meet the changing world with a more agile approach to both format and markets.
- We are exploring setting up an Events Advisory Group.
- You told us you wanted more advanced notice of our events programme and I'm reliably informed that this will be opening for expressions of interest in the coming weeks.

[Slide 18] We are once again delighted to be working with UKinbound and ETOA on our B2B hosted buyer programme Showcase Britain.

- We set ourselves the ambitious target of hosting 120 buyers from 15 international markets.
- They will be available for meetings at BIM in January, following which they will be participating in educational visits across the country.

[Slide 19] Industry engagement is a continuing priority for us. We will continue to evolve our market update webinar programme, which has been very well received.

- We are working closely with UKinbound on a joined up approach to the Britain pavilion at WTM.
- We're collaborating with partners in Scotland, Wales and England to engage their partners and members.
- Finally, you've said you want to speak directly to our teams but don't know who to speak to. Our team is here today so please come and speak to them – Louise Stuart, Laura and Ed.

[Slide 20] Data and insights are a key part of how we provide for you all. Some of the big releases to look out for include IPS data in October, Nation Brands Index in November/December and the VisitBritain forecast for 2024, which will be published around December/January.

- There will be a general election before the end of 2024 and we are working hard to make sure all of the political parties know the value of the visitor economy.

[Slide 21] We are putting considerable investment into transforming our digital and data systems. I'm pleased to say that our new industry website will be launching this autumn, making it easier for you to engage with our work and access our research. It will feature resources for destinations, UK suppliers, international travel trade, business events partners and media all in one place.

So, one year down. Lots for the VB/VE team to be proud of. We are here for the whole programme so please do come and say hello and I look forward to meeting as many of you as possible during the conference.

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