

TOURISM INDUSTRY CALLING FOR EMERGENCY RELIEF TO SAVE SECTOR FROM COLLAPSE

Vancouver, March 16, 2020 – The Tourism Industry Association of British Columbia (TIABC) is calling for government intervention to prevent a complete collapse of the visitor economy as a result of the COVID-19 crisis.

With massive travel cancellations that include flights, hotel bookings, conferences, events, and closures to major resorts such as Whistler-Blackcomb, Silver Star and others, losses amount to hundreds of millions of dollars already and will soon represent billions of dollars unless senior governments provide some form of financial relief to help businesses survive.

According to TIABC CEO, Walt Judas, virtually the entire British Columbia visitor economy is reeling at time when most industry sectors are typically gearing up for the busy spring and summer months.

Tourism in British Columbia generates upwards of \$19 billion in revenues annually through 19,000+ (small) businesses that employ over 330,000 people. The industry has enjoyed record-setting growth in recent years and has become the province's third-largest business sector.

TIABC is looking to senior levels of government to establish an emergency tourism contingency fund to help operators mitigate the impact of the crisis. It also calling for other measures to help businesses, such as temporarily suspending land tenure fees and employer health taxes, as well as providing loan payment relief.

The organization has been communicating with the province and is working alongside its provincial, territorial and national counterparts on recommendations to the federal government that include waiving the seven-day waiting period to collect employment insurance for temporarily laid-off employees, and extending the temporary lay-off maximum beyond 13 weeks given the unpredictability of the crisis period.

TIABC acknowledges that both senior levels of government are keen to help tourism operators through the crisis period and with business resumption and recovery efforts once the outbreak is over.

The Tourism Industry Association of BC advocates for the interests of British Columbia's \$19+ billion tourism industry. As a not-for-profit tourism industry association, TIABC works collaboratively with its members - private sector tourism businesses, industry associations and destination marketing organizations - to ensure the best working environment for a competitive tourism industry.

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Quotes

Alroy Chan - Chair, TIABC

"We know that many businesses have already cut staff with more layoffs expected this week. While some tourism operators have cash reserves to remain open for the time being, it won't be long before they close down permanently. Others are shuttering their businesses immediately. It's a dire situation until we receive some help from senior levels of government."

Barrett Fisher - CEO, Tourism Whistler; Director, TIABC

"This is uncharted territory for tourism in Whistler. Never before have we experienced such a quick and dramatic drop in visitation from both international and regional tourists. The impact to small and large businesses is significant. If we don't receive immediate assistance, both our short and long-term tourism viability is in serious jeopardy."

Ingrid Jarrett - CEO, BC Hotel Association

"Hotels throughout BC are experiencing cancellations of up to 80% of business on the books. Massive layoffs will continue this week including part-time, full-time and management level positions. It's critically important that we have government support for a recovery plan to ensure that our small and medium size businesses, who are all experiencing extreme hardship, are able to survive."

Walt Judas - CEO, TIABC

"Other than health, virtually no other sector has been affected to the degree the tourism industry has. Many people's livelihoods are at stake. Good paying, full-time jobs, entry-level positions for students, and everything in between are evaporating with each passing day. And once a business ceases to operate, we may never see it resurface. That affects the long-term prospects for the industry, well after this crisis concludes."