



# Cautiously optimistic

**We look at what the latest tiers mean for group travel, how group organisers have been adapting and how all eyes are on plans for 2021.**

**T**here has been much confusion, unsurprisingly, about what the latest tier system means for coach travel. Various associations and groups have been working hard to clarify the Government's restrictions. It has been confirmed that there is no restriction on coach travel in tiers 1 and 2, provided certain guidelines are adhered to.

Steve Rooney, who runs the Coach Tourism Association's membership services, said: "The latest DfT Safer Travel guidelines have been updated and there is no restriction on coach travel in tiers 1 and 2.

"Passengers need to be seated in household groups on the coach and in accordance with the operator's risk assessment. It is important to remember that the coach trip is not bringing groups together, it is transporting a number of separate household groups on the same vehicle, in the same way as a train or a bus which are both able to operate."



# John Wales, retiring chair of the Coach Tourism Association on hopes for 2021

**Q. It is of course an incredibly challenging time for the coach tourism sector – what can we remain hopeful about?**

**A:** I have never had the privilege of doing business with such a resourceful and flexible group as coach tour operators and Coach Tourism Association members. Clearly the overriding reason for being hopeful at present is the arrival of vaccines. It is too early to be certain but there is now the possibility that they will arrive in time for a 'normal' summer season and possibly, for some people, in the spring.

**Q. What is your message to group travel organisers about continuing to plan coach trips in the UK?**

**A:** We have entered three tiers of national lockdown, so naturally GTOs first of all need to be aware of what levels of restrictions apply in both their home area and their destination at the time of travel. So I would say to GTOs; go ahead and plan your UK trips but just be aware of current lockdown rules. Your CTA coach



operators will of course be fully up to date with these and, if tours can go ahead, will provide a risk-assessed coach with all necessary precautions taken. The same applies to attractions and hotel suppliers who have been incredibly flexible and fast moving in putting in place systems at their premises to ensure they comply with the latest restrictions and there is no doubt that they will continue to do this.

**Q. What are you optimistic about in 2021?**

**A:** The extent to which we can be optimistic about any form of 'new normal' for 2021 will of course depend on the effectiveness and the speed of the inoculation programme which the whole of the travel industry is now looking forward to. At the moment, I personally feel it is highly likely that coach tours will be running in the spring, and, with fingers crossed, something like normality will have arrived by the summer. This also applies to Brexit which, whilst it is currently on a knife-edge, will at least be resolved one way or another, thus giving both coach operators and hotel and attraction suppliers some form of certainty about the system they then have to operate under. ■

