

Auriel embracing tourism season

When the Covid-19 crisis struck, many tour operators had written off 2020.

Auriel Robinson, of Seatrails, was one of those who didn't expect things to pick up at all in 2020. Since getting back underway on July 1st, business has picked up and continues to do so.

She has been busy bringing Irish visitors on guided tours and hikes around the county, and she is thrilled to be welcoming visitors, despite losing all business from overseas visitors.

"Things have been going really well. I was delighted to get back on the horse as they say, it's all Irish people and people from abroad living here. So far all has been well and I've had very good customers," Auriel told *The Sligo Champion*.

"There seems to be a lot of people travelling along the Wild Atlantic Way and doing things for the first time and visiting places that they wouldn't have gone to or thought about otherwise."

Seatrails offers a variety of different hikes and horseback rides across the county. It is a big hit with overseas visitors. Auriel was devastated to lose almost four months of business, having enjoyed her best year ever in 2019.

"A lot of my business is international but I do get Irish business too. I lost more than half of my business. I lost everything from March to July, four months of tourists. I had people booked in from Canada and the States and Europe and they had to cancel and defer until next year and some of them I've had to refund. It was devastating. It's hard enough having a business like I do in Sligo, to be faced with that. You're doing well, and when I say well, it took me seven years to get here. I'm still growing but last year was my best year and for this to happen was just awful. I put so much work into it.

"I would normally be busy from March to October, the busier months are normally from April to August and September to October it quietens off."

No-one knows what the next few months will bring, and the uncertainty is difficult for those working in tourism. But Auriel is making the most of this so far.

"Any of my customers so far have embraced everything, which overseas visitors would do. I've had interesting conversations with them. They're all families, which is great. I love having families and their kids, it's a really good sign. People in Ireland aren't as inclined to book a tour when the weather isn't good whereas when I have my customers booked and sealed and they're coming here, they know what to expect."

Visitors from overseas are more likely to book tours in advance,



Auriel Robinson of Seatrails.

whereas domestic visitors may leave it to the last minute to book.

"That is alright but I'd much prefer to know in advance but so far I have managed it and I'm going to take what I can get because I don't know what will happen in the next few months."

She is lucky in that her work is in the outdoors and therefore she has fewer changes to make to her business in order to be compliant.

"I haven't changed any of my trails because it's all outdoor and I don't have a premises, what I am putting in place are precautionary measures so when people book tours online, they answer questions about whether they have had Covid, if they were close

to anyone who had Covid and if they have come from abroad and if they have, have they done their 14 days quarantine and are they prepared to sanitize before and after their hike or horseride and that they would adhere to the etiquette in terms of coughing and keeping the two metre distance.

"I'm being very careful. I tell them when I meet them that I haven't been in contact with anyone who had Covid because they are a little bit unsure sometimes."

It's been almost three weeks since Auriel reopened business and so far so good.

"I'm thrilled with it all."