INTRODUCTION:
UKinbound is the trade association representing the inbound industry. With over 370 members, including tour operators, attractions, hotels, restaurants and transport provider, our aim is to represent the views of our members and to support this vibrant industry which contributes over £22 billion to the economy each year.

We are delighted to be able to respond to the Committee’s inquiry. The UK is a highly successful tourism destination – ranked 5th in the world – with London often ranked as the world’s favourite city. But it is a sad fact that over 50% of the 33 million tourists who visit the UK annually only visit London. Furthermore, many who are thinking about where to spend their holidays are often looking for destinations which not only have iconic sites, but also beautiful scenery and a warm welcome. Whilst the UK scores well on historic sites, we do less well on countryside and welcome - very often because these are dimensions of the UK which are less well known in the market.

OUR EVIDENCE:
In responding to this inquiry, we conducted a survey of our members, many of whom bring large tour groups to the UK each year, and are passionate about promoting the UK countryside. We have set out their responses to the Committee’s questions below.

COMMITTEE INQUIRY QUESTIONS

1. What proportion of your customers currently request itineraries including Countryside? The answer to this question really depends on how you define Countryside. For most of our members, this involves visits to iconic areas such as the Cotswolds, the Lake District, Scottish Highlands etc, and is between 50%-90% depending on the market. The German market are particularly keen on Countryside holidays, but our operators who deal in the Chinese market are reporting that over 50% of their clients would like some element of rural tourism in their itinerary. It is important to be clear that very often the tour groups are keen to take photos, visit national parks or gardens, and maybe undertake some light rambling. But adventurous, “off-piste” walking/climbing is less common.

2. What are the key barriers to you to developing rural itineraries? (a) Transport (b) Availability of Accommodation (c) Availability of tourism product (d) Knowledge of the area? Availability of accommodation was by far and away the biggest barrier identified by our members. Many of our tour operators are looking for good quality, affordable 3-5* hotels who can accommodate groups. B&Bs are often not equipped to deal with groups and the accommodation standards and customer service can be
patchy. For some countryside “hot spots” – eg the Scottish Highlands – availability of accommodation is a huge barrier in peak season, and is simply not available in the winter months, meaning that demand constantly outstrips supply and tourism growth is severely restricted as a consequence. The second biggest concern was the awareness and knowledge of the UK’s Countryside product. Campaigns such as VisitBritain’s Countryside is GREAT campaign are helpful but it is important that it is promoted alongside bookable product, and the right type of accommodation.

3. **What, if any, changes are needed to give people better access to the coast and countryside?** In addition to better, more suitable, accommodation, it would be helpful if Regional Tourist Boards could work more closely with tour operators to “curate” their tourism product and help them promote it internationally.

4. **What more could the Government do to support the work of agencies to promote rural destinations across England?** Targeted marketing of key markets such as France and Germany to increase awareness of the UK’s countryside offer is particularly crucial in the light of the decision to leave the EU. Close collaboration between regional tourist boards and LEPs to ensure that rural tourism funding is protected would be highly desirable. Finally, our members would like to see increased planning support for hotel expansion in rural areas.

5. **What measures are needed to ensure transport and other infrastructure meets visitor needs?** 70% of all inbound visitors to the UK arrive by air and airport capacity is a real and present concern for many of our members. The Government needs to make a decision quickly on this issue if we are to reassure the market and maximise our potential tourism growth. Ensuring that train operating companies work closely with LEPs to connect the “last mile” of the visitor’s journey from major conurbation to rural landscape – from King’s Cross to Keswick, if you will – is vital, if we are to drive more inbound business out of the capital. However, with coach transport remaining the option of choice for most groups, ensuring that the rural destinations are coach friendly and accessible is critical if we are to succeed in expanding rural tourism.

**CONCLUSION:** The beauty and variety of the UK countryside has yet to reach its full potential in terms of inbound tourism growth. It is clear that many markets – from near European to long haul – are interested in including a countryside dimension to their itineraries. But there is more that we can do in terms of accommodation, product awareness and welcome to ensure that huge economic benefit which inbound visitors bring to the UK extends right across the country and not just to the cities.

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