Back

The past couple of years have been hard for all businesses, and those in the tourism and leisure sectors have felt the pain as much as anyone. *Alex Wright* looks at how the sector has coped and the challenges that remain even as the summer season gets underway

across the UK have been gearing up for their first full season without Covid-19 restrictions in two years. With large numbers of people numbers of people

year, some have invested in upgrading their premises, while others have been rebuilding a staff base decimated by Brexit and the pandemic.

In adapting to this new normal, many are made wholesale changes, while there have tweaked tried and trusted formulas. They have also had to embrace he rise of digital as more people have noved online, with many taking the time turing lockdown to build and improve heir websites and social media output.

At the same time, businesses are having contend with a host of challenges. Mos

notable are the cost of living and energy crises, which are severely restricting consumer spending and increasing their electricity and heating bills.

has added to the hospitality and tourism sector's woes, with 63 per cent of respondents surveyed telling FSB they are concerned about the problem. In response, FSB is calling on the Government to establish hospitality enterprise zones in England to take over vacant spaces.

Another problem is rising debt, with the percentage of businesses that have such obligations climbing to 77 per cent from 59 per cent since the pandemic started. In addition, 67 per cent of small hospitality firms that receive small business rates relief or the small business bonus said they couldn't survive without it. FSB has subsequently requested that

the Pay As You Grow initiative is made available to all businesses with Bounce Back Loan Scheme debt and for an extension of the Covid-19 loan support to those with pre-existing debt, as well as further cuts to business rates.

Added to all this, seasonal businesses are having to tackle the perennial challenges of maintaining cash flow all year round and expense control. They also have to wrestle with the issues of staff recruitment and inventory management, as well as dealing with customer bookings and enquiries, and marketing during the off-season.

EX WRIGHT is a freelance



seasonal businesses



had to find jobs for them didn't qualify for furlough, he repairs to facilities. Left with a essential maintenance and carry out upgrades and most of the quiet period to Green decided to make the shut due to the pandemic West Sussex, was forced to Campsite in East Wittering, When Stubcroft Farm group of seasonal staff who

In preparation for the new

more people are buying When Mr Green set his and posted regularly on the on key tourism websites and magazines, advertised also ramped up press and seasonal workers. He has core team of six to eight few months due to page and Instagram profile farm's website, Facebook PR efforts in newspapers

on the hard-standings." hedge-trimming to working all sorts, from mowing and crises. "We got them doing BSE and foot-and-mouth

"We had to think outside

business, badly hit by the his beef and pig farming years ago to diversify from who started the venture 30 we had," says Mr Green, the box using the resources

been exacerbated because Green. "The problem has increasing wholesale energy costs at that time, but they prices for the 2022 season July and August," says Mr we didn't know what energy prices. "Back in the winter, have rocketed in the past he could only base them on the rising cost of electricity orices were going to be in The biggest challenge is

> single customer in 2021. operate for half a season in

box using the resources we had "We had to think outside the season, Mr Green has built a with electric hook-ups."

Reaching a wider market

allowed to travel to, he's list of countries people weren't boat is based, was on the red because Turkey, where his able to operate during 2021 season. Despite not being targeting a wider market this with his wife Jenny, is private gulet charter business Salamander Voyages, a Peter Cooke, who owns

pandemic main aspirations," resulting from the pent-up demand says Mr Cooke "We have two

looking to capitalise on

size to different-sized groups." offer greater choice of boat speaking countries and to customer base in Englishknown to a wider "To make ourselves

season is so important for us."

and while they were able to after the company was started, pandemic hit barely a month Croatia, too. However, the to start an operation in boats in Montenegro, and plan 2020. They also sub-charter became a limited company in a full-blown business, which boat in 2003 soon turned into when the Cookes bought the What started as a hobby

> they operate from their home Government grants because they were ineligible for compounded by the fact that moment's notice. This was standby and ready to go at a they had to have a full crew on be removed from the red list, expectation that Turkey would In the meantime, with the near Ballyclare, Northern Ireland, so don't pay

business rates. Back and were able to access Bounce However, they

Cooke. "That's why the 2022 devastating for us," says Mr afloat. "Last year was which kept them recovery loans, business

generational families. holidays and from multihas been compensated for to have tailed off since the capacity. However, bookings running at 80 per cent the business currently in 2020 and 2021 have had holidays had to be cancelled demand during the school some extent by an increased Ukraine conflict began. This year at the same rate, with their bookings moved to this Those customers whose

out of the water," says better than a dolphin jumping come out on the water and shining everyone wants to Winston. "When the sun's Quay, Wales, with his father New Quay Boat Trips in New Jonathan Evans, who co-owns "Nothing sells a boat tour

his business, which started as used social media to promote see them." fishing boat in the 1950s and a family venture with one That's why Mr Evans has

and has started advertising on nstagram, TikTok and Twitter, our. It's already on Facebook, nas expanded to a fleet of

handing out leaflets in the will return this season. His biggest challenge is

in the first month alone. in the area, whom he hopes in a new catamaran to meet people buying second homes surge last year and from more benefited from a staycation boat-charters. The business the growing demand for Mr Evans has also invested way up to skipper," says Mr forced to look elsewhere as the season, many will be only offer them work during Evans. "But because we can street and progress all the

pursue other careers. retaining staff; the season so they often go off and only runs from the start of April to the end of October "They will often start by

coming in somehow." they have to keep the money

seasonal businesses



Google, getting 40,000 views

out on the water wants to come shining everyone "When the sun

Price reduction

bid to attract more guests. this has enabled Mr Adams to restaurant as a result. However, business, having to close his night for two people to £170, in a lower his prices from £225 per staff from Europe to run the been unable to recruit seasonal positive. Since Brexit, he has hoping to turn a negative into a Hotel in the Outer Hebrides, is 40-bedroom Isle of Barra Beach Guy Adams, owner of the

to have the chefs, waiters and "Because we now don't need

> to be paying dividends, as we his daughters. "So far, it seems our guests," says Mr Adams, to pass on a price reduction to totalling £100,000." have 241 bookings and deposits wife Teresa Jenkins and two of who runs the business with his washer-uppers, we've been able Mr Adams reinvests all the

but his biggest expense is upgrades and maintenance, business. He spends about money he makes back into the £40,000 per year on

from England, New Zealand. far afield as staff, who come Australia and Scotland and as

a five-month contract, in order to the standard rate," says Mr workers, we have always and attract the best possible retain them for the next season Adams. "As an added incentive, ewarded them by paying above "Because they only have everyone who stays the full

> location brings a receives a bonus." season also The remote

unique set of

drinks for the bar, with only one supplier and a two-week lead being supply of goods such as challenges, the biggest

the service is bad." and break down regularly, and services," says Mr Adams. "But unfortunately they are very old "We are dependent on the ferry time. Then there is the ferry.



30 | firstvoice | june-september 2022