News release

## Health & Wellness Tourism: A growing opportunity for the Scottish Rural Tourism Market

Health and wellness tourism in the outdoors is on the rise, and Scotland’s land-based businesses are ideally placed to capitalise on it.

This is according to Calum Johnston of SAC Consulting, part of Scotland’s Rural College (SRUC), who advises rural businesses on subjects such as diversification and tourism.

He says that, with strong demand for staycations this year, now is the time for rural tourism and farming businesses to start planning how they can profit from emerging health and wellness trends, from ice baths to forest yoga and ‘walk and talk’ breaks.

He adds: “Consumers are increasingly looking for more than just visiting the countryside. The pandemic has fuelled recognition of the importance of personal health, nutrition, relaxation and finding new ways to switch off from digital devices, and this is extending to their holiday decisions. It doesn’t need to be luxury and may not need major investment or dramatic change to your current business. It’s how you market it and thinking creatively and laterally about the facilities and assets you have and how they could be translated into a compelling offering for visitors.”

Wellbeing tourism has been identified as one of the top new farm diversification trends by the Farm Business Innovation Show, and Mr Johnston says Scotland’s rural businesses can be part of this growth market by offering varied and exciting escapes in the countryside, where visitors can be active and engage, for example in farm activities, farm tours and nature trails.

“Our clients are constantly looking to see how they can enhance their offering. Sensory gardens, forest bathing, organic skincare products, yoga on a paddleboard, thermal pools and wild swimming are all driving interest. Digital detox is high on the agenda, as is social connection. Those booking rural breaks in the UK also want good local food and drink with nutritional benefits. The Scottish countryside, with its scenery, secluded spaces and homegrown produce is primed to provide these ‘natural’ pursuits.”

Eco-therapy is another growing market with the acute rise in mental health concerns, exacerbated by the pandemic. Dr Adrian James, President of the Royal College of Psychiatrists, predicts that Covid-19 poses the greatest threat to mental health since the Second World War and Forbes Top 10 Wellness trends for 2021 include eco- and ‘Walk and Talk’-therapy.

Different to rural recreation, eco-therapy involves a trained practitioner who tailors structured sessions in the natural environment, integrating activities in a farm, garden, or woodland setting to improve mental, emotional and physical balance. There are already rural businesses responding to this, such Borders-based Rural Remedy, recently opened by Scottish Enterprise Rural Leader and SRUC graduate Annabelle Scott:

“There is a growing mental health crisis and we wanted to create a space where visitors could combine a break away with the family with the chance to offload and reset. Walking is known to have a profound impact on mental and physical well-being, and people talk differently when they are walking. Staying at Rural Remedy can be just a place to relax and unwind as a family, or if any or all of the family want to, they can access the services of a fully trained and qualified BACP registered Counsellor to walk alongside them, in the beautiful countryside, or meet together at the Hunters’ or Gatherers’ cottage.”

Mr Johnston points to the success of rural wellness tourism abroad from where Scotland’s agri-tourism sector can learn lessons: farms in Italy offering spiritual retreats in the countryside where visitors immerse themselves in the beauty of the rural landscape, and connect with nature to fulfil their physical and emotional needs; multi-award-winning luxury retreat Aro Ha in New Zealand with a variety of programmes designed to regenerate body and mind set in the beautiful, wild countryside; and Reclaim Yourself, spiritual and wellness adventures in the heart of the Icelandic mountains with tailored packages to meet consumer demand.

“The health and wellness market is competitive,” says Mr Johnston. “But Scottish rural businesses have the opportunity to differentiate through direct connection with Scotland’s environment, and it can be a lucrative segment of the tourism market.

“It doesn’t need to be high end. Nature, space and simple pleasures that Scotland’s farmers and landowners may take for granted will be a winning formula after the last year. It could be feeding lambs, easy access to cycling routes or a loch to paddleboard on, and while it may or may not be something you can charge a premium for, what you can offer visitors could be the difference between booking your rural retreat and another.”

**Ends**

For more information, contact Alana on alana@janecraigie.com or 07596 122184.

**Notes to Editors:**



Scotland’s Rural College (SRUC) was established in 2012 through the merger of the Scottish Agricultural College (SAC) with Barony, Elmwood and Oatridge Colleges. Through these institutions, we can trace our lineage back over 100 years.

Today, SRUC is on a journey to become Scotland’s enterprise university at the heart of our sustainable natural economy.

Our mission is to create and mobilise knowledge and talent – partnering locally and globally to benefit Scotland’s natural economy.

To achieve this, we draw upon SRUC’s longstanding strengths in world-class and sector-leading research, learning and teaching, skills and training and consultancy (through SAC Consulting).

A natural economy is fuelled by responsible use of our natural resources: people, land, energy, water, animals and plants. It is an n interlinked, shared, living system that creates opportunities and prosperity. It is multi-scale, dynamic and resilient through creative management and mindful custodianship.

By focussing on the sustainable natural economy, SRUC will strive to lead the way in delivering economic, social and environmental benefits for all, in Scotland, and beyond.