

Formentera's president and chief of tourism Alejandra Ferrer sat down with Vicent Tur (president of Hotelers de Formentera), Pep Mayans (president of the island's small and medium-sized business group, Pimef) and Lina Tur (spokeswoman for the Formentera Chamber of Commerce) for a press conference following a meeting to evaluate the current situation with regard to coronavirus.

Ferrer highlighted a Monday meeting with the regional government, economic sectors, island governments and town councils to discuss the cancelation of the ITB travel expo, related fallout and measures necessary to ensure promotion in the market.

On that note, Ferrer said she relayed Formentera's belief in the importance of reinforcing marketing efforts "beyond Germany, including in mainland Spain, Italy and France, which are among the most vital markets for Formentera".

She pointed up efforts to retool promotions in national markets like Spain and Italy that Formentera targets, and come up with new strategies to pick up slack following the cancelled events.

Contingency plan

President Ferrer and the other representatives called on the Govern balear to articulate a contingency plan. Ferrer underscored "concern among business owners because the coming weeks are when personnel are typically hired", explaining "the uncertainty of the current situation creates instability for employees and employers alike. If the situation were to continue, we would ask for assistance, as we did with the fall of Thomas Cook".

Increasingly flexible reservations

The president of the local hoteliers' group pointed out that the bottom had yet to fall out on existing reservations, but that "the previous seven days have seen a slow-down in new bookings by our visitors from Italy". Tur urged the sector to take a cue from airlines, travel agencies and tour operators and allow for greater flexibility in booking: "We'll boost confidence if

we make it easier for travellers to change or cancel their reservations".

Public health

In the words of President Ferrer, "we have an extremely good healthcare system in the Balearics and health authorities are doing everything in their ability to assure care for both islanders and individuals who may be ill during their stay on Formentera".

Tourism and health authorities are constantly updating protocols for workers and visiting travellers. As President Ferrer pointed out, the Govern balear has called on island administrations, town councils and health agencies to convene Monday 9 March to discuss related strategy moving forward.

She also highlighted reports from the Spanish tourism and health ministries that efforts are under way to create a specific protocol for establishing measures to address the various scenarios potentially faced by the tourism industry. "This is about being prepared in terms of how we protect our workforce and visitors", she said.

The Pimef chief voiced his hopes such a protocol would come quickly so it could be passed along to his associates. "It's crucial employers and employees understand the steps that experts say we should be following", he said. For now, Pimef has appraised local firms of specific hygiene measures to implement.

Ms Tur, for her part, urged prudence, assuring her colleagues that the Chamber of Commerce "is keeping a close eye on developments and intends to follow the directives of the health authorities".

Call for composure

Government and business representatives were united in that insisting calm, reasoned action would be key. According to President Ferrer, "this is a global issue and our only response to it can be local. Rest assured, we are following every development. Meanwhile, the Consell de Formentera, Govern balear and local business and tourism sectors are working together to put all the resources at our disposal toward shaping guarantees for the tourist season around a positive progression of events".

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