



Case Study

Historic Scotland

Extra Mile Award Winner 2010



*celebrating
excellence*

INTRODUCTION

Historic Scotland is an Executive Agency of the Scottish Government. We sit within the Portfolio of the Cabinet Secretary for Culture and External Affairs. Historic Scotland's role is to act as a leader and enabler to ensure that the historic environment delivers economic, social, cultural and environmental benefits for Scotland. We do this through historic environment legislation, our people and resources.

Our people are our key resource with 1,100 staff distributed widely across Scotland delivering a broad remit covering tourism, construction and development, and education.

We have around 350 historic properties across the length and breadth of Scotland and over 70 are staffed. This includes very popular sites like Edinburgh and Stirling Castles and also much smaller sites like the thatched Blackhouse on Lewis and New Abbey Corn Mill by Dumfries.

We work closely with VisitScotland and participate in the Quality Assurance Grading Scheme. Currently we have 13 five star properties, 47 four star and seven three star. We are also members of the Green Tourism Business Scheme and have 38 Gold and 29 Silver sites.

OBJECTIVES

Our mission is 'to ensure that our historic environment provides a strong foundation in building a successful future for Scotland.'

We are also here to promote access and understanding – to ensure it can be enjoyed by all.

Although Historic Scotland's work can differ dramatically - from delivering first-class customer service at our sites, to working with communities to preserve historic monuments – ultimately, we all share the same aim.

Historic Scotland's marketing team use a range of activities to reach our target Scottish audience. This has included things such as promoting our events programme through a radio partnership, running a TV campaign highlighting the benefits of Historic Scotland Membership or launching Family Challenge competitions encouraging people to visit as many of our attractions as possible over the summer holidays. Our recent campaign for the new visitor experience at Stirling Castle also included YouTube and Facebook advertising which linked into our dedicated Stirling Castle website and Facebook fan pages.

We use a variety of regional publications, bedroom folders and visitor information centres to highlight our attractions in their local areas, coupled with posters and flyers for specific events and promotions at individual sites.

At a national level we also work closely with partners like VisitScotland or National Trust for Scotland on promoting great days out across the country, such as the Castle Trail initiative in Aberdeenshire, the Great Days Out iPhone App or through targeted ticket promotions in national newspapers or on the radio.

Within our team (Commercial and Tourism Directorate) we have a number of key performance indicators from generating income to delivering world class service.

Our business activity (such as admissions, retail, functions, events and catering) generates around £30 million of income in addition to the funding received from the Scottish Government which we invest to support the delivery of sustainable economic growth.

Our front line staff are supported by our Business Development and Trading teams which includes sales, retail, interpretation, ecommerce, customer insights, membership, events, catering and marketing experts to provide valuable backup and ensuring that by the whole team working together we can provide an excellent level of customer service. We have a dedicated Learning Services team who work closely with site staff to enhance educational visits and learning at our sites.

CHALLENGES

All of our work is delivered through people and for people. Our work is underpinned by a set of values to which we aspire. We strive to be world class in what we do. This means learning not just from ourselves but working with and learning from peers and partners. We constantly look to improve the quality and standard of our work in all areas. In order to achieve this we train and develop our staff to deliver a world class service.

The roles that people play in visitor operations is very front line. The visitor operations teams working in our historic sites have a very important role in delivering customer care to visitors. The role consists of welcoming visitors to the site, assessing their individual needs and answering enquires by telephone and in person, imparting information relating to the history of the site, including delivery of guided tours, maintaining site presentation and managing the retail area.

Our biggest challenge is providing a consistency of service and quality across our staffed sites. We want visitors to receive the same standard of care at every site however we don't want to take away the individuality of our staff and we have to remember that each of our sites are very different.

We measure our standards through our mystery visit programme which has been developed in consultation with front line staff over the last 16 years. It is used as a tool to provide us with independent and objective feedback on a normal visitor's experience. The mystery visitor provides feedback on our standards (which are annually reviewed and revised where necessary). The standards are split into areas of the visitor journey from the staff welcome, appearance and skills and retail experience to the cleanliness of the toilets.

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Around 300 visits a year are carried out to sites, our events and the Ranger Service as well as telephone calls to our Business Development teams and our head office reception. Feedback is used by staff to create action plans as well as using the feedback to celebrate success and sharing of good practice. Lessons learnt from the programme are used to revise our training and development programme too. We continue to learn and year on year will use the evidence to help us improve and share good practice.

ENGAGEMENT

Historic Scotland is keen to work with and share learning with others. Examples include a collaborative mystery visit programme contract with the National Trust for Scotland and Forestry Commission Scotland, joint ticketing with the National Trust for Scotland, presenting on how staff are our champions to the Rural Heritage Property Group. We are part of many local community groups and Destination Management Organisations (DMOs) for example Edinburgh Tourism Action

Group, Urquhart Castle Liaison Group, Spirit of Speyside Festival, Moray Museum forum, Clackmannan Tourist Association to name a few.

We also work closely with Event Scotland and Visit Scotland as part of the focus years and, for example, developed a specific trade pass - the Scottish Heritage Pass - on the back of Homecoming 2009. We also work closely with tour operators, corporate events organisers and other trade contacts both in the UK and overseas to sell our admissions and corporate events products and increase visitation to Historic Scotland properties.

From across the team we have attended the Quality Advisor for a Day training which was a great opportunity to learn from others, undertake some benchmarking as well as gaining a clear understanding of the Quality Advisor role.

Entering the Scottish Thistle Awards has been a part of our annual review of performance. Each year we consider the categories, review feedback from judges from the previous year and agree on the categories that we have opportunities in. The whole team are then involved in providing evidence and examples of good practice that we can share with the Scottish Thistle Awards. It's a great way of sharing not only with the Award judges but our whole team as the nomination is circulated widely – a great way to celebrate our successes.

We've also found that being shortlisted and then winning puts us in touch with other businesses. For example we met with Camera Obscura to share our award examples and learn from each others practice.

RECOGNITION

We are the largest operator of paid tourist attractions in Scotland. Since winning the Extra Mile award in 2010 we have been approached by other Scottish visitor attractions for advice and support and will host a breakout session at the ASVA conference in November 2011 to share our experiences and learning.

We have recently created new posts (Tourism and Community Managers) in each of our three regions to increase our business to sites through the level of engagement with the community and tourism industry in general as well as sharing our learning and expertise with others. The managers are bedding into their new posts however steps have already been taken and improvements are being driven. Examples include, working with a partner site to help drive their business and taking a role in the development of 'the Year of Creative Scotland' for Historic Scotland.

SUCCESS STORY

Our award plaque is prominently displayed in the reception area of our Head Office in Edinburgh for staff and visitors to see. We have 62 of our staffed sites taking part in the VisitScotland Quality Assurance Scheme. Following each grading visit the report is carefully reviewed and an action plan developed to improve facilities and the experience. Over the years we have continued to increase the number of both four and five star attractions.

INVESTMENT IN THE FUTURE

We constantly review our organisation and look for improvements whether in facilities, resources or staff development. For example:

We have recently commissioned a visitor attraction system for our admissions and retail which will start to be rolled out in the coming months. The new system will provide us with cutting edge

functionality and the opportunity to develop our management information and help drive our business as well as removing manual back office processes

Annually we undertake shop re-fits to improve the retail experience and promote products. Our staff training and development is a key area and new training has been rolled out to improve staff's knowledge of Scottish history. Star Performer training is under development where we will look to drive high performers to share their knowledge with others and really shine. E-commerce is a big area of growth for us for the future. Our strategy is to move sales of our tickets and passes online and we are currently developing new online channels for engaging with our business to business clients and our consumers. As part of this we are currently developing a new sales strategy which will see the introduction of a key account management structure in our Sales team.

We align our target markets with VisitScotland and work closely with them to attend workshops, sales trips and exhibitions both they and VisitBritain organise. We are also a partner in the VisitScotland consumer campaign which targets the Scottish domestic market. We meet regularly to discuss opportunities and to maximise the benefits of promoting heritage attractions as part of Scotland's wider tourism offer.

TOP TIPS

- Enter, what have you got to lose – yes, it takes time to write your nomination but you'll get some constructive feedback, ideas on how to improve your business and grow.
- It allows you to question and re-assess what you are doing.
- Allow plenty of time to complete your nominations and get staff from the front line involved too.
- Get as many colleagues to read your nomination as possible – everyone has examples they just haven't thought of sharing (we don't all like to blow our own trumpet) and it's the real stories that make the difference to nominations.
- It's a wonderful celebration at the EICC awards evening, very motivational and a great networking opportunity.

Doreen Waller
Quality Services Manager

Historic Scotland

www.historic-scotland.gov.uk