

# Pride of Passion

FOR SCOTLAND



**'Community Challenges are set up to help communities understand how to make their tourism offering better. They will pay back time, money & effort invested and will be a hugely beneficial experience.'**

## Orkney keen to show visitors more of its many dimensions

*'Tourism figures have been quite static for the last 20 years, and the age profile of our visitors has increased. We don't want to be swamped by tourists but we need to make sure those who come realise there's more than a week's worth to see and do, that there are many islands to visit and that Orkney's more than a summer destination: there's plenty going on to enjoy at all times of the year. That way we might increase numbers without diluting the tranquility.'* **Charles Tait, writer, photographer, Orkney Tourism Group Chairman**

### **If it ain't broke...**

...you can still tune it up a bit! Orkney rates hugely well with visitors in all the surveys and its blend of history, nature, tranquility and authenticity generates pretty unstinting praise. Understandably, nobody wants to rock the boat for fear of spoiling the balance between very happy visitors and a healthy, but not stretched, industry.

The challenge Orkney faces is to improve the sustainability of their tourism and spread business across more of the islands and over more of the whole year. There are some difficulties with this including the way internal ferries are scheduled and routed and the fact that visiting cruise liners in the summer can swamp all the mainland attractions with visitors, diminishing the experience for all concerned. What the Orkney Tourism Group wanted was a forum to discuss all of these things and how they could start doing something about them. *'The Community Challenge couldn't have come at a better time. Local businesses are working closely together and helping to boost Orkney as a quality tourism destination at a time when the industry is under pressure due to the credit crunch and ever increasing fuel costs.'* **Malcolm Macrae, Skail House**

### **More talk...to create more action**

As well as encouraging individual businesses to work together, OTG persuaded other bodies with big parts to play in local tourism to get together with them regularly to sort out how to make things better for all concerned. The Harbour people now work with OTG, tour operators, the Council and bus companies to make sure cruise ship visits pass off successfully for everyone. OTG is also in touch with the Council and various festival organizers suggesting they could all be sharing information, planning together and maybe creating a central website. There's even been work to cultivate links with Caithness and the north Highlands because most of Orkney's visitors come through that part of Scotland en route to the islands. Making the journey through that region a full part of the holiday, rather than just a journey, will help both Orkney and Caithness. And visitors, of course! Closer working with Northlink Ferries to help sell the Orkney experience is part of the plan, too.

## Case Study

Also, in a relatively small place, people in the community have a pretty good idea of what's out there by way of things for visitors to do, and of what's going on. Or they think they do. OTG have increasingly been using the local press to let people know what they're up to, what new developments have just come in and to remind people in a subtle way that tourism is important in the local economy.

### Going further, doing more, staying longer

Good information and good opportunities are what visitors need to help them do more stuff, more easily for more of the year. The rationale also follows that if there's more to do, visitors will be inclined to stay for longer – it's a long way to come for most folk, after all.

To encourage people off the mainland of Orkney and to visit the county 'off season' OTG is actively looking at hobby-based holidays in shoulder and off season: many of the tutors, activity and course providers are located in the smaller isles. They have also kicked off a program of familiarization events focusing on related sectors such as crafts, and a number of businesses have hosted free 'sampling' evenings for other businesses to try out their products and activities. Personal experience is the best way to get people to talk about and recommend your business, after all. The marketing power of personal experience is also being used in the form of visitor testimonials and reports which are being encouraged and gathered via the OTG website.

### What the 'Community Challenge' provided

*'I'd enjoyed Pride & Passion days before, so I was looking forward to a creative day in the Pier Arts Centre with like minded people and two good leaders. It's always interesting to learn about other businesses and how they do things. I hoped and expected to be woken up and re-energised as I had been before, but as I heard about other businesses I also looked at ours: it was too busy, we were too stretched, I was too tired. By the end of the day I realised that to keep what matters about our business we must sell part of it. Certainly not an outcome I expected, but looking back I'm grateful for an extremely creative day. Anyone want to buy two watermills and a cottage?!'* **Sandy McEwen, The Mill, Westray**

The Orkney Tourism Group wanted to take advantage of Pride & Passion's external perspective and 'neutral status' to help them raise and work on some aspects of what they did that were not problematic as such but that they recognised needed some attention to ensure future prospects. Pride & Passion provided a number of events and industry leaders from elsewhere to challenge businesses' perceptions of what they do, and to help them identify value they could add and new opportunities to explore. They also discovered that their knowledge of each other's products and the islands' offerings could do with more regular refreshing. The Group feel that the Challenge brought businesses and sectors together who'd not necessarily have been in touch otherwise, and that that was a massive boon.

### What did we all learn?

Orkney's approach to its situation reminds us that:

1. Growing trade doesn't just mean trying to fill more bed-nights in peak season. Up-selling and cross selling experiences from attractions to activities to trips to retail to culture is generally welcomed by visitors as well as being good for local coffers. It's not about hard sell and we need to embrace it.
2. There are many motivations for travel other than the usual 'holiday' reasons: arts and culture (if strong locally) can be a deciding factor so tourism and arts/culture sectors should work closely to stimulate and cultivate this demand. We can give people reasons to travel.
3. Cultivating existing clients by selective contact about other events and places they might like.
4. Everyone can be better informed about other businesses and attractions in their area. Yes we can!
5. Packaging different elements of a trip together for people can be attractive – it takes some leg work out of the process for visitors and may help them get more from their trip. Make things easy.
6. However well an area may be doing, no one can afford to rest on their laurels. Expectations evolve.

**[team@prideandpassion.net](mailto:team@prideandpassion.net) or free phone 0800 028 0588.**