

Chief Executives Report on Q1 – April – June 2017

Overview

Quarter 1 was unsettled to say the least by a variety of national events – local elections and a snap General Election, start of Brexit talks, terrorist attacks, the Grenfell Tower fire and bouts of extreme weather.



The General Election resulted in a new Tourism Minister – John Glen MP for Salisbury- with a brief covering Arts, Heritage and Tourism whilst Sport was passed over to join Gambling and Civil Society. The lack of a majority in the General Election and ensuing uncertainty resulted in the decisions on the Discover England Fund being delayed from the original date of 12th June. By the end of the quarter there had still been no announcement about successful projects. The imminent report from the Rural Tourism Select Committee appeared to have been shelved due to the snap election which seemed an almighty waste of time!

Worryingly, the national tourism statistics for the early part of 2017 showed a downturn in domestic tourism with overnight trips down between Jan- April by 4% and day trips volume also decreasing by 4% in the three months period and year to date to March 2017, while value decreased by 3% compared to the same period in 2016. However, international visitors continue to grow exponentially – perhaps the impact of the exchange rate – with trips increasing between Jan – April 2017 by 11% .

At TSE, Quarter 1 activity was focussed on securing buy in for memberships, destination partnerships and marketing campaigns – it included the launch and closing date of the Beautiful South Award applications, the creation of a new relationship with VisitScotland for training provision and the start of the large East Surrey EAFRD project. We also recruited a new permanent Destination PR Manager.

I attended a wide range of events during the quarter including:-

- England for Excellence Awards at Waldorf Hilton
- TMI Conference on Rural Tourism in Sheffield
- A fam trip to Gosport with TSE staff, local Councillors and the Tourism Manager
- Romsey VIC Refurbishment launch with local Cllrs/Mayors
- East Hampshire TIC Open Day with local MP Damian Hinds
- Maritime Greenwich World Heritage Site 20th Anniversary celebration
- Two BBC Interviews – Southern Rail Strike/Possible impact of America's Cup on Portsmouth
- SLA Meetings with Destination Partners in Windsor, Southampton and Portsmouth
- Great West Way Discover England Fund Steering Group
- Kent Members Network Event at Port Lympne



Looking ahead – I have invitations to speak at National Trust Managers Forum on 6th July, the Business South Champions breakfast meeting in Royal Southampton Yacht Club 11th July and Gatcom – Gatwick Airport Consultative Committee - in November.

Our **Membership** team held a number of Member Network events at Weald & Downland Museum, Chichester; Port Lympne, Kent; Motion Simulation, Berks; Bekonscot Model Village, Bucks; Stonor, Oxfordshire and 6 more events are in the diary between now and October 2017.



Following the withdrawal from joint membership scheme by VisitKent the VK Investors were approached directly and a Kent Network meeting was held at Port Lympne. As a result many of the Investors came on board as direct members and overall value of membership increased compared to last year.

Following several site visits, Chessington World of Adventures, Surrey has been chosen as the venue for the AGM and Tourism Conference to be held on September 21st. Chessington also agreed to become members.

Unfortunately we had confirmation of two **Destination Partners** withdrawing from formal service level agreements in the first quarter – New Forest and Gravesham – the former has outsourced from the Council to a Community Interest Company (CIC) called Go New Forest and the latter closed its tourist service altogether.

However, discussions with potential new DPs and new Business Improvement Districts (BIDs) were ongoing. Tunbridge Wells BID also came in under the umbrella partnership of its local authority.

I was very pleased to appoint TSE's new **Destination PR Manager**, Irene Caswell, at the end of April. Irene comes to us with a background in PR and journalism including spells at West Dean and Rolls Royce. During the quarter there were 25 features generated - 17 online and 8 in print with Destination partners mentioned 38 times and commercial members 47 times. Publications included Sunday Times, Daily Telegraph, Waitrose Weekend, The Sun, foodnews.com, loveexploring.com, cultural traveller. There were a number of Press Trips during the quarter included Boundless Magazine – A weekend in Wine Country (vineyards in Kent/Sussex), August Charrin a Belgian blogger, in Portsmouth and Gary Ollason from The Sun on a Self River Cruising trip on Thames. I would like to thank Karen Roebuck for the excellent work she did covering the PR service on an interim basis since October last year.



The **Groups and Travel Trade** team organised a Beautiful South section at the Great for Groups South show at Kempton in April and worked with the same team on creating a new version to be held in Kent in October. The rate card for Excursions was launched to existing exhibitors by targeted location. Changes to the administration meant that up front sales of show guide add-ons, furniture and electrics could happen for the first time and this got off to an excellent start. Also for the first time ever, exhibitors will be able to take advantage of a SmartScan app that will, from a scan of the visitor badge on their mobile phone or tablet, make notes on their preferences and send a follow up email instantly from their device to the visitor. A new Excursions website was slightly delayed

for its planned 30th June date but can be seen on www.excursionsshow.com. The Group Travel Guide was also launched and saw a significant revision of its listing forms to make it easier for participants to upload their details online.

For the first year in a long time we are starting to see reductions in web traffic to **visitsoutheastengland** with April to June inclusive down 4.7%. This still equates to a yearly estimate of 1.38 million visits. Some key landing pages are suffering from how Google displays certain search results and an otherwise bigger deficit is being offset by a selection of new pages (maps and events) that are hoped to grow further as the year goes on. However, we felt it is now time to do a significant upgrade on the website to make it more responsive and this should be completed by the start of 2018.

A competition with Forest Holidays (launched late June) has attracted 500 new subscribers. The lure of a better prize is having a positive impact on new subscribers helping us to refresh and build our consumer database. Jon Sharkey, our Digital Manager is also seeing lots of demand for training from the members and ran a number of courses on SEO and Googleanalytics during the quarter.



Our new campaign aiming at the **Meetings Incentives, Conference and Events (MICE)** market got into full swing this quarter bringing on board lots of new partners from the public, private and educational sectors – 18 campaign partners were secured and the new **Meet Beyond London** website was launched. As a result of competitions in PA Life and Executive PA over 330 potential MICE

buyers have registered to receive further information from Meet Beyond London partners.

Training services confirmed all the existing franchise partners for 2017-18 sustaining our reach of Welcome to Excellence courses across the UK. A total of 1,177 participants attended courses on a national basis and this included Warner Brothers Film Studios (to date 8 Welcome All courses) and two pilot courses delivered to test content for the new VisitScotland EVE courses. A total of 167 participants attended courses in the South East region. This included training 5 trainers at the Blue Water Shopping Centre in Kent. Other courses held at Rochester Cathedral, Churches Conservation Trust (Welcome Host Volunteers), Lymington Harbour and West Dean College. A total of 244 City and Guilds registrations have been achieved to date.



Work has begun on an upgrade to Welcome All content with a potential launch date of early October. We are taking advice and

guidance from Tourism for All and VisitEngland to ensure content meets current guidelines on welcoming all visitors with disabilities and specific needs.

Materials for Scottish version of Exceeding Visitor Expectations (EVE) is being finalised – a further pilot course was delivered on 20 June. A partnership has been formed with VisitScotland, ASVA (Association of Scottish Visitor Attractions) and Alba (a Scottish training company) to facilitate successful Scottish wide promotion and delivery of courses.

The **Research team's** largest project this year, the East Surrey & Mole Valley Rural Tourism Project, started in April and included visitor survey work across locations in rural East Surrey including Box Hill and at the Epsom Derby. There was also a lot of work in compiling a destination audit of accommodation, attractions, cycling and walking provision and rural tourist related businesses and facilities generally. Attendance at the TMI Conference on Rural Tourism in Sheffield was both timely and invaluable in building a comprehensive picture of the current trends and opportunities for rural tourism.

Other research work has been secured with the Isle of Wight, Beaulieu, Bognor Pier Trust, Henley, Winchester CC, Winchester Science Centre, Tough Mudder and over 20 Cambridge Model contracts.

Visitor Services organised an open day and leaflet exchange at the Petersfield TIC and I was privileged to stand aside local MP Damian Hinds and East Hants Portfolio holder Cllr Watts in praising the work of the TIC in supporting the tourism industry in the area. Romsey TIC re-opened after a period during the quarter when it was closed for re-furbishment by Test Valley BC. I attended the re-launch with local Councillors, businesses and the town and District Mayors.



I attended the **VisitEngland National Awards 2016** ceremony at the Waldorf Hilton in London and was pleased to see not just the host Sue Perkins, but also South East winners Waddesdon Manor for best large attraction, the Monkey Haven on the Isle of Wight for best small attraction and Blenheim Palace for the China Welcome category.

The Beautiful South Awards 2017 were launched in the quarter with a closing date of 26th June for the majority of categories – there was initially some concern that the entries would be significantly down but a late rally means that we expect around 150 entries this year. Last year was an all time record at 179. The Awards ceremony is booked for the 29th November at the Grand Hotel in Brighton (which is also the headline sponsor this year replacing Shepherd Neame).