



Groups & Travel Trade Meeting Notes

Tuesday 10 May 2022, 2pm

Attendees:

Florence Wallace, Fiona Errington – VisitWiltshire; David Lane – BGAM – Holiday Inn Salisbury-Stonehenge (Chair); Belinda Richardson – Marlborough; Simon Cox & Sophie McConnell – Cholderton / Bluestone Vineyard; Marie Thomas - Salisbury Cathedral; Jen Edmondson - Bowood House & Gardens; Ruel Newsome - Holiday Inn Salisbury-Stonehenge; Sarah-Jayne Beasley - English Heritage; Sophie Ramsden - Salisbury Museum; Lorna and Barry Matthews-Keel - Salisbury's Chequered History Guides; John Blake - Marlborough College Summer School; Jeff Bruce - Stonehenge campsite; Alex Bradbury & Marianne Cartwright-Hignett - Iford Manor Gardens; David Dawson – Wiltshire Museum.

Meeting Notes:

1. Welcome and introductions

A brief welcome was given by David Lane.

2. How's business? eg. top line trade visitor figures, forward bookings etc.

Attractions were reporting that domestic business was picking up with group bookings either on par with pre-pandemic levels or increasing for 2022. Some reported good forward trade bookings for 2023.

Accommodation business is strong with other customer segments often displacing trade business competing for availability and price, making it difficult for the trade.

International bookings are starting to improve too, with Germany, Netherlands, France and Denmark mentioned as travelling again.

One attraction mentioned rise in VIP / out of hours bookings – which shows more of a high-end focus for the trade and could offer larger margins for businesses.

Many are still reporting that lead times continue to remain short, perhaps still showing some Covid anxiety and constant media coverage of cost-of-living crisis is unhelpful and starting to impact booking decisions. Trade activity continues to be critical to reinforce 'confidence to book' messaging.

3. How we work with the Trade:

a. Sarah-Jayne Beasley, Account Development Manager – Travel Trade for English Heritage

- Visitor figures are strong and beating budget and up on pre-pandemic levels
- April strong and forward bookings for May/June looking strong eg. April budget hit 15 April for the month and groups forecasted 16,000 and came in at 22,000. FIT's forecasted 1,500 and came in at 3,500.
- Continuing to be flexible for the trade but revised t's & c's and business use, needing to safeguard revenue streams.

- Reached out to top 50 operators and 40 of those have shared their full year itineraries – some of which sell right up to departure dates.
- Working on both short term and long-term strategy for trade and now into 2023/2024 planning. Short lead – ad hoc for 2022. Short lead strategy for FIT, OTAs, small TO's and GTO's.
- Innovative with OTAs, now selling catering and retail options, as well as collecting donations for Stonehenge which has been very productive. Lead time growing for bookings to 72 hours or 4/5 days before visiting.
- Starting to see the USA and German markets coming back. French market doing well too, but Spanish and Italian is slow. The domestic British audience is on par with USA but Stonehenge primarily a weekend, school holiday destination with 70% of 1.6m going into Stonehenge equates to the inbound audience.
- Two-year pricing working well
- Chinese and Asia likely to come back for Q1 2023.
- New credit control measures put in place to mitigate risk and loss.
- Up on catering and retail income
- Tuesday and Wednesday lowest footfall for trade due to Windsor Castle closures on these days.

b. David Lane – BGAM – Holiday Inn Group

- Limited supply of product to sell makes it more difficult. Prior to covid trade business was predictable and stable – the trade planned itineraries Aug/Sept for following year and liaised the hotel to agree rates and book. There was an expected 20% cancellation rate throughout the year. In 2021 itineraries were not confirmed for 2022, due to uncertainty, so this year enquiries are coming in with short term lead times.
- There continues to be pent up demand of corporate and transient leisure business with people prepared to pay more, which is now directly competing with the short lead time enquiries from the trade. Its weighing up whether they can afford to discount to the trade in return for the volume they can bring knowing they have the demand from other sectors.
- Monday – Thursdays were traditionally good for trade business but now the corporate business is able to fill these rooms at a better rate. Therefore the Holiday Inn group is having to re-think trade strategies taking into account the value of these relationships for the future as long term trade business is important to them.
- They have been offering flexible terms and conditions of cancellation policies etc. as this helps trade relationships, but they are now reviewing and adhering to terms to protect revenue streams.
- As prices rise, so do customer expectations, which have delivered and managed carefully. The person booking is not always the tour leader and doesn't always communicate accordingly. This has caused problems.
- Moving forward it is hoped international inbound will improve by Q1 2023 with European's travelling more and the far east starting to travel again.
- Maintaining relationships with trade now is critical for future trade business.

A group discussion followed, including working collaboratively, industry impacts, domestic & international travel, Cruise business and OTAs etc.

4. VisitWiltshire and Great West Way trade update

Flo issued the [Travel Trade Activity Update for January – May 2022](#), which includes the new [It's Time for Wiltshire Groups Guide](#).

Following a series of recent events/ exhibitions and travel trade engagement with buyers the following impacts are worth noting:

- Furlough and some other support schemes are still in place in several countries.
- Staff shortages following many being laid off during covid, now recruiting and some staff still working reduced hours.
- Tour Operators are now experiencing influx of bookings and therefore busy reacting to these, with little time for product development.
- The cost-of-living crisis worldwide means there are increased costs for travellers and England is now being seen as luxury destination for some markets. High-end experiential luxury product is now in demand.
- War in Ukraine is starting to impact bookings, not only with increased costs but also with confidence to travel in some markets.
- North American demand to travel is still positive

Overall, Tour operators, DMCs, and other trade intermediaries we have been in touch with are upbeat about prospects for travel, stressing the importance of reassurance messaging and the need for them to review existing programmes. Trade have never been more in need of 1:1 destination support, so keeping Wiltshire front of mind is likely to ensure inclusion in future group and FIT programmes.

If you are developing your products in response to any of these factors, please keep us informed. Particularly in relation to high-end immersive, luxury personalised experiences.

a. 2022/2023 group members

The VisitWiltshire travel trade group includes the following businesses/destinations. They are linked to specific travel trade product pages, which make it easier for the trade to have the relevant information to help plan their visit or contract for itineraries to Wiltshire.

Attractions/Activities

[Bowood House & Gardens](#), [Salisbury Cathedral](#), [Marlborough College Summer School](#), [Iford Manor Gardens](#), [REME Museum](#), [STEAM Museum of the Great Western Railway](#), [Wessex Museums - Hardy's Wessex Exhibition](#), [Studley Grange Garden & Leisure Park](#), [Stonehenge](#), [Cholderton Rare Breeds Farm](#), [Bluestone Vineyard](#) and Longleat.

Wiltshire Towns

[Corsham](#), [Bradford-on-Avon](#) and [Marlborough](#)

Wiltshire Accommodation

[Holiday Inn Salisbury-Stonehenge](#), [The Old Bell Hotel](#), [Legacy Rose & Crown Hotel](#), [Best Western Plus Angel Hotel](#) and Stonehenge Campsite & Glamping Pods.

Refreshment Stops, Transport & Tours

[The Bridge Tea Rooms](#)
[Salisbury, Stonehenge & Sarum Tours](#) and [Mad Max Tours](#)

ACTION: Please can you check your travel trade product page and advise any amends to [Flo](#). If you represent more than one product that is not listed, please contact Flo to arrange a new page.

b. Travel Trade Opportunities

Great West Way Travel Trade Directory

Great West Way is continuing to review and update content for this new directory and are especially keen to hear from Ambassadors with any news for 2023 such as anniversaries, new specialist tours, new

accommodation/attraction openings etc. There is also space for destinations and businesses to enhance your exposure by advertising from as little as £285 + VAT for ¼ page. All advertising/advertorial opportunities are available [here](#).

The digital directory will be distributed via email to the Official Tour Operators and via enewsletter to the travel trade database of over 2,000 key contacts. It will also be promoted via third party industry partnerships, and is a key resource to assist the trade in developing Great West Way programmes for 2023 and beyond.

Information from your Wiltshire travel trade pages will be included in this directory – unless you have supplied anything different.

Travel Trade Exhibitions & Events

We annually attend a number of international and domestic travel trade events and exhibitions. There are stand sharing opportunities for the following forthcoming exhibitions:

[Group Leisure & Travel Show](#), Milton Keynes, Thursday 6 October 2022 – From £720 for 3 stand sharers (excluding graphics etc.)

[World Travel Market](#), Excel London, 7 – 9 November 2022 – From £2,000 for 3 stand sharers on UKinbound pod.

Please also register your interest for [Vakantiebeurs](#), Netherlands, 12–15 January 2023, [Excursions](#), Twickenham Stadium (date tbc), [ITB Berlin](#), Germany 8-12 March 2023 and [British Tourism & Travel Show](#), Birmingham, 22 – 23 March 2023.

Awaiting information about DBNA from VisitBritain. Will communicate when received.

ACTION: Please contact Flo by 31 May, if you are interested in any of these opportunities.

Flo has asked those on the Wiltshire Travel trade group to have a think about what trade support you may need for 2022/2023, so this can be scheduled accordingly. Please take a look at the [Wiltshire Travel Trade Tactical Activity Plan 2022/2023](#) to align activity with your strategies.

ACTION: Please contact Flo if you require a bespoke meeting to discuss your requirements.

5. Travel Trade Tactical Activity Plan - Priorities for Discussion

a. Short-term future of fam visits

The group discussed the options for future fam visits. Do we go back to organised large coach group fam visits or to give the trade an opportunity to visit in ad hoc self-drive fam visits? In a post-Covid world we decided to continue with the self-drive fam visits in a similar way to 2021.

Flo is following up with a few trade media partners who can help promote Wiltshire self-drive fam visits to include all travel trade group partners during selected dates in the autumn.

Flo will update the group with details in due course.

b. Autumn advertising campaign

It was agreed that the group would like to run another digital Wiltshire trade campaign this autumn, which would be similar to last year. Fiona/Flo will take learnings and recommendations from the previous campaign and issue a proposal to the group.

ACTION: If you have any specific ideas or requests on targeting for a digital travel trade campaign for the autumn please contact [Fiona](#).

6. Any Other Business

None

7. Date of Next Meeting

Thursday 22 September 2022

Flo will send members of the travel trade group a diary invitation for this and will be in touch nearer the time with agenda information.

ACTION: If you have any ideas for speakers or would like to add something to the agenda, please advise Flo.