

Case Study: Group Travel



Promoting an inspiring group travel destination

The Coach Tourism Council estimates that nearly seven million people took a coach tour in the UK in 2009 as more people looked for an affordable holiday at home. Further indicators show that with more people retiring and the over 65s population continuing to increase, there will be many more potential coach touring and group travel customers.

To capitalise on this growing sector, Leicester Shire Promotions has worked closely with local partners over the past year to promote Leicester and Leicestershire as an inspiring group travel destination to leading group travel organisers and coach tour operators from across the country.

Fam visits are key to success

One of the key areas of focus for this new group travel strategy was to raise the profile of Leicester and Leicestershire directly with Group Travel Organisers and Coach Tour Operators throughout the UK. Early research into this market indicated that there was a considerable disconnect between current perceptions of the destination and the reality of what it has to offer. To change this, one of the key activities in Leicester Shire Promotions' strategy has been to work with partners to co-ordinate and deliver familiarisation tours for some of the country's leading coach tour operators. Working with tourism partners, the company has been able to build its database and attract some of the more prominent Coach Tour Operators to visit the destination and consider Leicester and Leicestershire's dynamic offer for their groups and tours.

- April 2009 saw a very successful familiarisation visit for 35 coach tour operators to The National Forest. The two-day 'Great Outdoors' themed itinerary included visits to Conkers, Snibston, Donington Park, Moira Furnace and an overnight stay at the Best Western Yew Lodge Hotel. Feedback was extremely positive with more than half of the delegates planning a leisure visit in 2010
- In October 2009, 15 of the country's leading coach tour operators were invited to Melton Mowbray for a 'Taste of Melton Mowbray' familiarisation visit. The trip included guided tours of Belvoir Brewery, Melton Mowbray town centre, Ye Olde Pork Pie Shoppe and a visit to the East Midlands Food and Drink Festival at Brooksby Hall. The trip resulted in four major group bookings in Melton Mowbray in 2010 including 35 rooms for two nights at Scalford Hall during December 2010
- March 2010 saw the 'History and Heritage' familiarisation visit that included guided tours of some of the county's leading historic attractions such as Bosworth Battlefield, Snibston and Great Central Railway. Accommodation was provided by Barceló Hinckley Island Hotel. Again, the trip resulted in very positive feedback with many tour operators considering similar trips for their groups in the forthcoming year

In addition to this, Leicester Shire Promotions has worked closely with the East Midlands Tourism Regional Travel Trade Co-ordinator to include Leicester and Leicestershire in fam visits by Simply Groups and Norman Allen Tours. As a result of this, Leicestershire now features in the recent Norman Allen Tours brochure.

Ross Young from Spot Hire Travel, based in Kent, attended the 'Taste of Melton Mowbray' fam trip and commented: "We run a couple of successful tours based on our experiences on previous familiarisation trips, elsewhere in the UK. This trip enabled us to see at first-hand parts of the country we were yet to visit including highlights such as the East Midlands Food Festival, Melton Mowbray and Ye Olde Pork Pie Shoppe. We will now be including these in the tours we offer to customers."

Martin Peters, Chief Executive of Leicester Shire Promotions added: "Feedback from our familiarisation visits over the past year has shown us that they are the most effective way of promoting the destination to the travel trade. The key to the success of these visits is the support of local partners which has enabled us to go to the group travel market with a strong, consolidated offer."

Direct bookings prove strategy on right course

In addition to the major familiarisation visits, other activity has included highly targeted advertising in annual directories, continued engagement with national bodies such as Hidden England and the Coach Tourism Council, online and web activity targeting the groups market, and a proactive public relations campaign. A comprehensive database has also been developed to ensure regular contact with key tour operators.

Martin Peters continued: "The supporting activity is important to our aim of promoting Leicester and Leicestershire as an inspiring group travel destination. However, the fam visits have given us the opportunity to directly showcase the city and county to many of the country's leading coach tour operators and the bookings resulting from these trips have shown an immediate and ongoing return from this particular activity."