

## **STOKE-ON-TRENT TOURISM**

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## **1. STOKE-ON-TRENT CITY COUNCIL TOURISM TEAM**

In 1986, the City of Stoke-on-Trent was proud to host the National Garden Festival. At that time, the City Council employed one officer to develop both tourism and economic investment in the City. In order to capitalise on the interest in the City generated by the National Garden Festival, the City Council formed the specialist Promotion and Tourism Unit in September 1986.

The new unit was led by a Promotion and Tourism Officer, supported by an Assistant Promotion and Tourism Officer and three Tourist Information Centre Staff. On its formation, the Unit's brief was to maintain hotel occupancy and visitor attendance in 1987 as 1986. A marketing budget of £66,000 was made available with "Do China In A Day" being the major promotional campaign.

At the end of 1987, due to careful planning and hard work, the objectives set for the unit were not only met but surpassed. The achievement of the unit in establishing the City of Stoke-on-Trent as a vibrant tourist destination was recognised by being voted runner-up in the Local Government Authority "Tourist Authority of the Year" awards and being nominated in the Sir Mark Henig awards.

The City Council was quick to recognise the achievement of the unit and expanded the Department in 1989. The Unit was called The Marketing and Tourism Division led by a Chief Marketing and Tourism Officer. In 1990 the City won the 'Destination of the Year' award in the English Tourist Boards' England for Excellence Awards.

The unit has been located in several departments of the City Council over the last 15 years. Since September 2000 the Tourism unit has been within the Economic Regeneration Division of the Directorate of Regeneration & Community. The Tourism unit comprised Leisure Tourism Marketing and the Tourist Information Centre until 1996 when the Staffordshire/Stoke-on-Trent Conference Bureau was formed as a public/private sector partnership. In 2005, the unit expanded again with a City Centre Marketing & Events team moving into the Tourism unit, and the establishment of a staffed Tourist Information Point at Trentham.

The unit is headed by the Tourism Manager, with 18 members of staff across the various tourism teams. The current staff structure is shown in Appendix 1.

## **2. THE NATIONAL GARDEN FESTIVAL**

The National Garden Festival in 1986 was undoubtedly the key factor in the stimulation of Stoke-on-Trent as a major tourist destination.

It not only made Stoke-on-Trent the focus of national attention as a “Garden Festival City” and attracted many thousands of visitors in its own right, but it gave Stoke-on-Trent a reclaimed site, ready-made for redevelopment.

As a means of promoting the City, it was a huge success. In the 179 days of its duration, it attracted 2,184,052 visitors, arriving in 367,249 cars and 11,451 coaches. Publicity coverage gave Stoke-on-Trent access to a national audience and a springboard for launching the City as a major tourist destination.

As an exercise in profitability, it was also a huge success. The total cost of the Festival was £17.45 million, of which £8.08 million was recouped by income from visitors, exhibitors and the sale of assets. In addition, it is estimated that £7.2 million was spent off site by visitors, and as a result of a policy of promoting the local economy, £12.5 million worth of contracts were awarded to local companies.

The development provided employment for 1,280 people, and estimates put the permanently created jobs figure at 2,300 after the completion of the redeveloped works. Employment is a major consideration when allocating public investment capital, and the results show that the staging of the National Garden Festival was a far-sighted project that surpassed even the hopes of its original advocates.

The site of the 1986 National Garden Festival has now been developed into a large business, retail and leisure site and is now known as Festival Park. Festival Park provides a range of attractions from cinemas and bowling to Waterworld, the UK’s No. 1 Aqua Park, and Stoke Ski Centre, and is undoubtedly a major attraction for day visitors and an important visit for longer term holiday-makers. Festival Park and the extended Festival Heights has proved to be the most successful redevelopment out of the five National Garden Festival sites.

## **3. TOURISM IN STOKE-ON-TRENT**

### **3.1 Overview**

Tourism in Stoke-on-Trent saw tremendous growth in the late 1980s and early 1990s, and the volume and value of tourism continued to increase along with the investment in new attractions and facilities.

The core of the City’s offer has always been “The Potteries”. Many of the larger firms such as Wedgwood, who opened a Visitor Centre in the 1970s, to cope with the huge demand for factory visits, and Spode have long realised the potential of providing visitors with the opportunity to “experience” the manufacturing process, and purchase the factory’s ware directly from an on-site shop. Spode and Royal Doulton both opened Visitor Centres in 1996.

The award winning “Do China in a Day” promotion, which began in 1987, was a great success, and was integrated with the “China Link” bus service from May 1990. This campaign was relaunched in 1992 as “Visit the Potteries for a China Experience”. The “Do

China in a Day” promotion was a victim of its own success, as the title was taken literally, yet it is impossible to visit The Potteries and see all its china attractions in one day.

By 1996 the City’s ceramic tourism offer was at an all time high with three visitor centres; over forty factory shops; eight factories offering tours, several with on-site museums; plus the City’s three ceramic-related museums including the Potteries Museum and Art Gallery which has the world’s finest collection of ceramics.

The late 1990s brought investment in leisure and entertainment facilities. Both Waterworld and Stoke Ski Centre on Festival Park saw investment from new owners, and the refurbishment and redevelopment of the two Cultural Quarter venues was one of the largest regional arts development projects in the country. The Regent Theatre and Victoria Hall now bring 400,000 people a year into the City Centre. The opening of the new Repertory Theatre on Leek Road added to the new night time offer.

A number of smaller attractions such as steam railways, garden attractions and close proximity to the Peak District and Alton Towers meant that the City and sub-region by the late 1990s had a significant tourism offer.

An economic impact survey in 2000 stated that 5.3 million people were visiting the City each year spending £194 million and supporting almost 6000 jobs.

The last 4 to 5 years have however presented many challenges.

The core “Potteries” product has seen some investment, particularly at the Wedgwood Visitor Centre and Ceramica, the City’s new Millennium Commission funded attraction , but also sadly, the loss of some factory shops, factory tours and in December 2004 the closure of the Royal Doulton Visitor Centre. Moreover, the negative national headlines surrounding the problems in the ceramic industry, particularly the demise of Royal Doulton, led many people and some of the travel trade industry at large to believe “The Potteries” had closed altogether.

Although we have some excellent attractions and facilities, the urban environment of the City is poor. Competition, nationally and internationally for the visitor market is now fierce and visitors expect and demand good quality. Many of the larger Cities and many of our peer group of Cities have invested heavily already in regeneration programmes and now have vibrant, attractive City Centres, fit for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. Stoke-on-Trent City Centre still has some way to go to compete in this marketplace. Stoke-on-Trent is currently missing out on the first big trend of the new Century – City Breaks.

Stoke-on-Trent has always attracted significant numbers of overseas visitors to “The Potteries”. The international situation since 2000 has been very difficult, due to numerous factors such as the outbreak of Foot and Mouth disease, 9/11, subsequent terrorist activity and the war with Iraq, and currently the strength of the pound. Overseas visitors and particularly those from the USA, who represent over a third of overseas visitors, have been noticeably absent.

The group travel market nationally has changed and declined in volume, and many attractions and factory shops are seeing far fewer groups and coaches. The day visitor market regionally has also declined in recent years. The City has always struggled to attract hotel development, and still has very few hotels and some issues with quality with

the existing hotel stock. The lack of hotels, particularly in the City Centre, seriously inhibits the growth of business tourism and short breaks.

Some local factors such as the upgrade to the West Coast mainline meant there were no trains to Stoke-on-Trent in 2003 and the significant road works on the A500 (2003-2006) have also had a negative impact on tourism.

The future, however, gives cause for optimism.

North Staffordshire Regeneration Zone status and the North Staffordshire Housing Pathfinder RENEW will significantly change the urban environment over the next 10-15 years. The immediate focus on the City Centre, informed by the North Staffordshire Tourism Strategy will inevitably benefit tourism.

The existing A50 link, plus the A500 improvements and improved West Coast rail links, means access to the City is good and improving. Virgin are now providing half hourly services to London, and services to Manchester every 15 minutes, which create increased opportunities for rail-based visitors.

The fairly recent significant investment (£4.5 million) in the Wedgwood Visitor Centre in 2000 will be added to in 2007 with the opening of a new £8 million Wedgwood Museum.

Planning permission, subject to Government Office West Midlands approval, has also been given (June 2005) for a 90 bedroom Wedgwood branded hotel.

The £100 million redevelopment of Trentham Gardens is one of the most significant tourism projects in the UK, and will do much to change the city's image, improve civic pride and bring new visitors into the area.

The Regent Theatre and Victoria Hall are already bringing new audiences with some of the best regional theatre and concert hall facilities in the UK.

The canal corridor is being improved by the North Staffordshire Canals and Connecting Railways project. New visitor moorings have been installed at Longport and Westport Lake. The feasibility of re-opening the Burslem canal arm is being investigated.

The new North Staffordshire Tourism Strategy set a 10-year strategic framework and 5-year Action Plan for tourism. The implementation of the four Action Plan programmes are on track. The recommended improvements to City region marketing resources and structures and County level tourism partnerships are underway.

### **3.2 Funding**

In the early 1990s, certain areas of the City were designated as Objective 2 areas by the European Union. This has resulted in a significant amount of EU funding being levered for investment programmes, some of which have tourism elements. Examples of such projects include the improvements at the Gladstone Pottery Museum, tourism marketing promotion and the Cultural Quarter, as well as significant improvements to the Public Realm.

Additional sources of funding such as the Millennium Commission, the National Lottery – Sports, Arts & Heritage funds, and Single Regeneration Budget programmes 1-4, have also

provided important funds for various projects, such as Ceramica, Fenton Manor Sports Complex and the Cultural Quarter.

Currently funding is available for the City from the North Staffordshire Regeneration Zone, the Housing Pathfinder RENEW and Greening for Growth as well as bidding opportunities to Tourism West Midlands.

### **3.3 Accommodation**

Stoke-on-Trent has approximately 51% of all serviced accommodation in the North Staffordshire/South Cheshire area. However, due to the close proximity of accommodation in the boroughs of Newcastle-under-Lyme and Staffordshire Moorlands, visitors have a choice of over 50 serviced accommodation establishments. Nevertheless, the City has a low number of bedspaces compared to other cities of a comparable size such as Nottingham or Leicester. A Hotel Development Study was commissioned in 2002, a summary of which can be downloaded from this website.

The most recent hotel development is the 120 bedroom Express by Holiday Inn on the Trentham Lakes site. The majority of local hotels have undertaken recent refurbishment programmes and some have extended their bedroom stock.

Trentham will start work on the first of its two planned hotels in Autumn 2005, with the first, a family hotel, due to open in Spring 2006, and the second, a five star hotel, due to open in Spring 2008. Wedgwood, has also been granted planning permission (June 2005) for a hotel at its Barlaston estate, subject to approval from the Government Office West Midlands.

## **4. TRANSPORT LINKS**

Stoke-on-Trent benefits from its central location, being situated close to the UK's major motorway links and the mainline rail links.

### **4.1 Road Links**

Stoke-on-Trent benefits from its proximity to the M6, alongside junctions 15 and 16, and from the presence of the A500 dual carriageway which links the two junctions with each other and the A50. The new A50 opened up the City to the East Midlands and M1. Road links between the six towns of Stoke-on-Trent were often found to be confusing to visitors, but much has been done to improve this by the installation of brown and white tourism signs, although there is still room for improvement.

### **4.2 Rail Links**

The City has a main railway line with good connections to London and the South, Birmingham and Manchester, which is a great resource for a tourist destination. The West Coast line is now operated by Virgin Rail, who are now providing half hourly services to London, and services to Manchester every 15 minutes, which create increased opportunities for rail-based visitors.

### **4.3 Air Links**

The City is located directly between the cities of Manchester and Birmingham, with these two cities both hosting large and International Airports, which are both in the process of

expansion and growth. The ever-expanding East Midlands airport is also only an hour's drive away. Having three airports within a 60-mile radius of the City is also a great resource for attracting overseas visitors.

#### **4.4 Canals**

The canal systems of the Trent & Mersey and Caldon Canals are a unique feature of the City and are both a tourist attraction and a means of transportation. Many visitors annually pass through the region on canal or longboat holidays, and their potential has been recognised in various improvement schemes. Since 1997, considerable work has been undertaken by the City Council, British Waterways and the private sector on canal improvements such as towpath improvements, canalside signage, and Etruria Industrial Museum, which sits alongside the Trent & Mersey canal, has also benefited from substantial improvements. British Waterways Waterspace strategy aims to double visitor numbers to the Trent and Mersey by 2012. There is a need to create high quality, safe, secure visitor moorings within the City, to maximise potential benefits.

A feasibility study has been commissioned by RENEW North Staffordshire in partnership with British Waterways for Burslem Port. The results on its economic and engineering viability will be available by July / August 2005. Reinstatement of the Burslem canal arm will contribute significantly to the visitor offer.

### **5. LOCAL TOURISM STUDIES**

Market research data is crucial for future planning, market strategy formation and for securing investment in the City. Various studies have been carried out, including visitor surveys, economic impact surveys and customer service questionnaires completed in the Tourist Information Centre and by the Conference Bureau. The first comprehensive study on the volume, value and profile of visitors was carried out in 1994 by the Heart of England Tourist Board (HETB). Subsequent visitor surveys were undertaken in 1997, 2000, and 2004. The executive summary of the 2004 survey is available on this website. Heart of England Tourism also produces Economic Impact Assessments for Stoke-on-Trent Tourism. A copy of the 2004 Economic Impact data is also available on this website.

A County research group has been established in 2005 to improve the resources available for research, and to monitor trends and generate a greater understanding of local tourism needs and challenges. The group has commissioned Staffordshire University and Heart of England Tourism to carry out a programme of annual research with support from the local tourism industry.

## **6. THE IMPACT OF TOURISM**

### **6.1 Environmental**

Tourism has a large environmental impact on the City both in a positive and a negative way.

Positive effects are the improvements in quality of life as investment is made in “greening” the City, increasing sports and leisure facilities, improving the City Centre and City infrastructure and enhancing the City’s image.

Negative effects are the increased traffic flow, the centralisation of facilities away from outlying areas and the creation of a transient population of visitors which can cause resentment amongst local people.

### **6.2 Economic**

The economic benefits of tourism can be huge. It can provide and sustain long term employment and serve to attract investment by other industries, which in turn, lowers unemployment and increases the wealth of the City as a whole.

From the 2004 Economic Impact Survey it is estimated that tourism contributes at least £135 million per year to the local economy, and it is estimated that tourism supports at least 3,936 jobs in Stoke-on-Trent.

Tourism is now making a vital contribution in an area which is suffering decline in employment in its traditional industries. Tourism income, however, goes further than just the direct spending by visitors. As money is spent and re-spent in the economy and as further spending is induced by higher incomes from greater employment, the benefits of receipts generated by tourism reach all areas of local industry. This is known as the “multiplier” effect.

## **7. NORTH STAFFORDSHIRE TOURISM STRATEGY**

A new tourism strategy was launched in March 2004. This is a sub-regional strategy and is the most comprehensive look at tourism in North Staffordshire for 15 years. The strategy was a £90,000 project funded by the regional development agency (AWM) through the North Staffordshire Regeneration Zone. The strategy provides a 10 year framework for the development of tourism and a 5 year action plan for 2004 – 2009. Documents relevant to the strategy, including the Executive Summary, are available on this website.

There has been considerable progress in implementing key recommendations in the North Staffordshire Tourism Strategy. Actions implemented by Stoke-on-Trent Tourism team in 2004/05 include:

- Securing the location and resources to enable the re-location of the Tourist Information Centre in April 2005.
- Project managing the procurement of a new destination management IT software system to help to improve visitor information, bookability and marketing activity, installed in April 2005.
- Playing a key role in the formation of the Staffordshire Destination Management Partnership (DMP)\* and also on new working groups to co-ordinate:
  - Tourism Research

- Travel Trade Marketing
- Learning, Skills and Workforce development
- Staffordshire Good Food Awards
- Progressing the concept of a new destination marketing (DMO) structure for the City region including meetings with Newcastle-under-Lyme.
- Leading the formation of a Ceramics Festival steering group, in conjunction with the Ceramics Development Officer, which will deliver the City's first Ceramics Festival in September 2005.
- Obtaining the Burslem Regeneration Company's approval for the development of the Burslem ceramic tourism cluster and preparing a Burslem Visitor Management Plan (published July 2005).
- Gaining the Ceramic industry's general approval of and support for the Tourism Strategy and its adoption by the Ceramic Industry Forums (CIF) Design and Marketing Action Team Panel.
- Communicating the Tourism Strategy within the City Council and to the Regeneration Zone and to appropriate priority groups to help inform regeneration programmes.
- The delivery of a local residents campaign in 2004 to address low civic pride which included a door drop to 75,000 households, an outdoor marketing campaign, production and distribution of 20,000 local residents guides and creation of a new web portal [www.stokeonyourdoorstep.co.uk](http://www.stokeonyourdoorstep.co.uk)

**\* STAFFORDSHIRE DESTINATION MANAGEMENT PARTNERSHIP (DMP)**

The creation of a DMP for Staffordshire is a direct response to the recent launch of the Southern Staffordshire Visitor Economy and North Staffordshire Tourism Strategies and the restructuring of tourism delivery across the West Midlands region.

The principal role of the Staffordshire DMP is to take responsibility for the management of the shire county as a tourism destination working in partnership between and with other stakeholders in order to foster economic success for the tourism sector. A Delivery Programme has been developed by a Steering Group including Staffordshire local authorities, and support agencies including Business Link, Learning and Skills Council, Southern Staffordshire Partnership, Heart of England Tourism and the Regional Centre for Tourism Business Support.

A public/ private sector shadow board was established in April 2005 which now meets quarterly to discuss and implement the Delivery Programme where currently possible. It is also considering future structures for the DMP.

The Board and Partnership will be formally constituted from April 2006.