



Great West Way Connections Meeting Notes

Virtual Meeting Tuesday 5 April 2022, 3pm

Attendees:

Florence Wallace - Great West Way; Fiona Errington - Great West Way; David Andrews - Great West Way; Steve Fossett - Great West Way; Iain Terry (Chairman) - Windsor Castle; Holger Lenz – VisitBritain; Paul Chibeba - Brunel's SS Great Britain; Marie Thomas - Salisbury Cathedral; Tori Ackling - The Angel Hotel; Zoe Kent – Blenheim Palace; Daniel Gauld - Ascot Racecourse; Jacqui Mills - Bristol Airport; Jon Chamberlain - Visit West; Paul Upton - First Travel Solutions; Carla Brooks - Brooks Guest House Bath & Bristol; Luke Johnstone - The Old Bell; Julia White - Windsor & Maidenhead; Belinda Richardson – Marlborough; Ruel Newsome - Holiday Inn Salisbury Stonehenge; David Lane - Holiday Inn Salisbury Stonehenge Group; Fritha Costain - American Museum & Gardens; Jen Edmondson - Bowood House & Gardens; Adam Jones – Aerospace; Natalie Ramsey - Hilton Reading; Rachel Farr - Marlborough College Summer School; Alison Hilton - Museum of English Rural Life; Graham Horn - Tours2Order; Alan Mellins - Maidenhead Heritage Centre; Jenny Lowe - Berkeley Castle; Anne Bartlett - Tour & Explore

1. Welcome and introductions

2. Business Updates

- a. How's Business? Eg: Top line trade visitor figures, forward trade bookings, COVID impacts etc.

There is a general consensus from attractions, destinations and transport providers that we are starting to see an increase in international trade visitors to the Great West Way.

Since England COVID restrictions were lifted mid-February – confidence across the industry grows and the next 6- 8 months is looking more positive for all.

One large-scale attraction reported consistent 20% growth per week, since January, of OTA, Tour Operator and FIT business. It was also reported that domestic coach group bookings were looking promising for 2022.

However, when compared to 2019 numbers, attractions and tour guides are reporting around a quarter to one third down on bookings.

Accommodation providers continue to report short lead time for bookings due to uncertainty and an increase in cancellations.

b. Update on how Ambassadors are including/referencing Great West Way in their travel trade activity.

Visit West are referencing Great West Way in conversations with the trade, most recently at ExploreGB, which was well received as the German and Netherlands buyers are already familiar with the route, due to the ongoing trade activity from the Great West Way team.

Visit West has recently launched a new Bath & Bristol Travel Trade website, where Great West Way is being featured. In addition, Great West Way features on the Visit Bath and Visit Bristol consumer websites.

The reason for encouraging everyone to do this is to help raise the profile of the Great West Way and increase the reach of the Great West Way messaging so that visitors see the region as part of a wider area to visit and stay.

ACTION: Ambassador businesses and destinations are invited to review their own websites with a view to add Great West Way content/map/narrative. Reminder that the Great West Way marque, image library, brand toolkit, illustrated map – can all be found in your Ambassador log in area [here](#). Please advise [Steve](#) if you require a reminder of your log in or any further content for this.

**3. VisitBritain Travel Trade Update Europe by Holger Lenz, Manager Central Europe
VisitBritain**

The European travel trade after two years of the pandemic

- Overall strong financial & business support schemes for the travel trade were in place across Europe (but varying from market to market)
- Furlough and some other support schemes are still in place in several European countries (incl. Germany, Spain & Italy – until the end of June). A lot of staff there still work reduced hours.
- No major operators have disappeared but some smaller specialist ones have given up (e.g. for language & school travel or self-catering). In some markets (Spain & Nordics) mergers have happened.
- Some operators have dropped Britain programmes (e.g. de Jong Intra in the Netherlands), others have added domestic products or other European destinations.
- A lot of operators had to dramatically reduce staff numbers during the pandemic and are now struggling to find skilled replacements.
- Across Europe a lot of tour operators are still under financial pressure and desperately need to earn money this year. This is often impacting on their programmes for this year and they are focussing on bestsellers (and there is no appetite for risks).

Trends emerging during the pandemic & Current trends

- Strong domestic tourism and intra-European in the past two years.
- Bookings through travel agencies increased across Europe as they offered a safety net and reassurance & information. Trend is unlikely to stay.
- Very flexible cancellation policies are still in place and operators are struggling to change them back to more long-term cancellation. This is causing operational issues for them.
- Bookings are still done much later/more last-minute than before the pandemic.
- Group sizes are now much smaller (still seen as safer but continuing a pre-pandemic trend).

- Very upmarket and expensive products are doing well as people have saved travel budget over the past two years and want to treat themselves.
- Sustainable & responsible travel and products becoming more important.

Bookings for Britain & Expectations for the rest of the year

- European operators only had a minimal numbers of bookings for Britain in the past two years, predominantly VFR travel.
- 2020 Britain programmes were transferred to 2021 and 2022 but very often trimmed down.
- Bookings for Britain started to pick up once the testing requirements and the passenger locator form were dropped and European markets came out of their Omicron waves.
- The war in the Ukraine had initially quite a strong impact on new bookings (and especially in Italy & Spain) but after the initial shock and now realising that the conflict is likely to continue for longer and stay within the Ukraine, bookings have now picked up again.
- Because of the geographical location within Europe could actually benefit from the current situation as other destination in Central, Eastern and even Northern Europe will be suffering.
- Bookings for Scotland are very strong in most markets, England is still somewhat lagging behind. London as a city destination is only slowly recovering for tour operators.
- The school & youth group travel sectors is only very slowly restarting again as it has extremely long lead & planning cycles (e.g. schools starting to plan now for the autumn). Impact of passport requirement and loss of LTR still not clear.

Product development & Looking ahead

- Operators are now slowly looking at product development for 2023. The extend of it and the appetite for taking risks will be depending on how this year is going.
- Now is a good time to proactively promote new products & product ideas for next year.
- Especially for the Southern European markets still some product development for late this year (but all cities focussed).
- Some of the trends from the past two years will be continuing:
 - Smaller group sizes and more bespoke experiences
 - Car-touring holidays will remain to stay popular
 - Strong interest in outdoor activities
 - Growing interest in responsible travel and sustainability
- Feedback on some current challenges:
 - Operators are struggling to get allocations in hotels high rates for accommodation driven by strong domestic demand
 - Contacts for suppliers have changed and DMCs are still short-staffed and slow at responding. New relationships still need to be established
 - Increasing costs for mobility (FIT & Groups) and high prices for car hire
 - The P&O Ferries situation
- Concern about the longer-term effects of high inflation and the war in the Ukraine and the impact on the economy and costs and disposable income for travel (the UK is already more expensive than other competitor destinations).

4. Great West Way Travel Trade Update

Flo echoed some of Holger's concerns with the trade such as England being seen as a luxury destination when compared with other European countries and also harder than ever to influence programmes with buyers sticking to products they know will sell. We are doing what we can to influence a broader the product offering for new Great West Way programmes. Another challenge

is that furlough still remains in some countries, which is limiting the engagement with staff and subsequent activity.

Please refer to the latest [Travel Trade Activity update January – March 2022](#).

There continues to be lots of conversations and follow up from the recent ExploreGB event and Excursion exhibition. The latter was busier than expected and the domestic audience is out and about and interested, so it was really promising for future business.

We are currently working on the revised edition of the [Travel Trade Directory](#) and doing a full product listing audit. Buyers find this resource really useful and it is our main 'bible' of information for the trade.

ACTION: If you haven't already had a look at the current edition and checked your product/destination listing please do so and forward Flo any amends before 22 April.

We can also continue to offer free key travel trade product pages for Ambassador products/destinations on www.GreatWestway.co.uk/traveltrade which contains specific trade information and is often linked to in follow up communication with buyers.

ACTION: Please contact Flo to request a template to fill in and return so we can include your product/destination.

a. Proposed Tactical Activity Plan 2022/2023

Please take a look at the Draft [Great West Way Travel Trade Activity Plan for 2022/2023](#). This details what we are doing to distribute Ambassador products and destinations to the trade in a timeline format.

The colouration illustrates the timing of activity taking place and, in some areas, this spans over multiple months. Events have been highlighted and where dates are known these are detailed.

The plan includes development of collateral and website pages. Plus, trade communication via newsletters to our extensive database of trade contacts.

There is also ongoing trade engagement with buyers, offering product sales training sessions, but worth noting this has been impacted due to limited staffing for buyers. We continue to offer fam visits but we now recommend these as bespoke self-drive opportunities for buyers. Flo will be in touch with any specific opportunities for individual supplier businesses/ destinations as they arise.

We continue to liaise with third parties eg. UKinbound, ETOA, AGTO, Meridian etc for possible fam visits and joint activity opportunities.

ACTION: Please advise any amends/additions to the DRAFT Tactical Activity Plan 2022/2023 by 22 April After this time, we will assume the Connections group is happy with the planned activity.

b. Forthcoming Opportunities

We're keen to find out which Exhibitions and events Ambassador businesses and destinations are considering attending for Autumn 2022/Spring 2023.

It will be particularly beneficial to join up as a wider Great West Way offer for the international events such as World Travel Market – November 2022, Vakantiebeurs – January 2023 and ITB Berlin – March 2023.

We are also able to attend the domestic exhibitions under a Great West Way umbrella, such as Group Leisure & Travel Show – 6 October 2022 in Milton Keynes; or Excursions 2023 etc.

We are keen to run another Great West Way Marketplace event and are still investigating the best way to do this and at the right time so as to maximise new product development for buyer and supplier conversations. Currently considering Oct/Nov 2022 but tbc.

Key Opportunities include:

- Travel Trade Directory – Listings, advertising and editorial opportunities.
- Solus Newsletter – spotlight on 'your business/destination on the Great West Way. From only £250 plus VAT. Great for launching any 'new for 2023' trade content.

Please take a look at the Great West Way [Travel Trade Marketing Opportunities](#) for further details.

ACTION: Please contact [Flo](#) to discuss or book any of these opportunities.

5. Discussion for Priorities & ideas for 2022/2023

Flo mentioned that we could look to deliver future Travel Trade Business Support Sessions in the autumn.

Are you doing any additional trade activity that would be beneficial to join up with a wider Great West Way geography?

ACTION: Please advise [Flo](#) of any priorities and/or new ideas for trade activity and engagement and/or travel trade business support that you feel would benefit your business/destination.

6. Any Other Business

Steve Fossett, Head of Ambassador Relationships introduced himself to the group. Please contact him SteveFossett@GreatWestWay.co.uk for any Ambassador queries.

David highlighted some 'hot off the press' news (not related to trade), that Great West Way has just had funding confirmed from VisitEngland, as part of their new Escape the Everyday domestic campaign running in May and June. Visit West have also been successful which enables us to aligning with them. This domestic campaign is focussed on Cities plus product including large rural town product and those linked to TXGB, to encourage short term bookings. The press release can be seen [here](#). Further information will be sent out but if you're interested to get involved, please get in touch.

Date of next meeting: Tuesday 18 October 2022. We will send out a calendar invitation.

Please let us know if you have any ideas for speakers or would like anything added to the agenda.