



## **Groups & Travel Trade Meeting Notes**

**Thursday 25 May 2023, 2pm – 3pm**

### **Attendees:**

Florence Wallace, Fiona Errington – VisitWiltshire; David Lane – BGAM – Holiday Inn Salisbury-Stonehenge (Chair); Elaine Falconer – The Stones Hotel; Marie Thomas - Salisbury Cathedral; Sharon Thomas – Corsham; Anna Walton – Longleat; Anna-Karin Hanson – English Heritage; Aimee Edwards – Cholderton Rare Breeds Farm/Bluestone Vineyard; Maisie Storm-Anderson - Salisbury Escape Room; Paul Clarke - Mercure White Hart Hotel, Salisbury

Speakers - Katharine Worsley & Paul Beaumont from Greatdays Travel Group

### **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 are reporting good trade business during the first quarter and in some cases better than 2019 numbers. Forward bookings are also looking strong in the Salisbury area with the return of cruise ships and language schools and others focussing on getting prepared for the return of the Chinese visitor market, initially with student visitors in the UK, followed by the possibility of inbound for next year.

There were mixed reports from attractions regarding the Coronation weekend with some reporting numbers not as busy as expected due to weather and those without links to the Royal theme and others with indoor spaces were busy.

Accommodation providers in Salisbury are reporting occupancy for the last three months is at 81.5% vs 76.5% last year with an average room rate of £71 vs £65 last year.

One Salisbury accommodation provider reported some trade bookings for this year haven't materialised as much as one would like, which may have been down to a refurbishment having taken room stock out. However, he reported 5 x forward bookings from the trade for next year. He also highlighted some food and beverage challenges in the city with many hotels shutting their restaurants due to staffing costs and lack of demand for opening for dinners.

A county response to trade enquiries for rooms, event space, large-scale bookings etc. was discussed and the chairman highlighted VisitWiltshire's activity already works to convert business like this for the county. The VisitWiltshire trade team is well-positioned to coordinate and distribute information accordingly and will continue to do so.

#### **3. Greatdays Travel Group – Domestic Business Update and Tips by Katharine Worsley and Paul Beaumont**

Contact: Katharine Worsley, UK & Ireland Product Manager, Greatdays Travel Group

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## Domestic groups v. International

- Domestic groups – cost conscious - basic buildable product – fit into off peak times – added value (cream tea, tea and coffee on arrival)
- International – bespoke, larger budget, like the library tour at Salisbury Cathedral

## How people can work more closely with us. How can attractions work with wholesalers? What events do we attend (e.g. Excursions, CTA etc.)

- Frequent contact like at trade shows, build relationships (ETOA, CTA, Excursions)
- Product training like with English Heritage
- Fam trips like last week

## What are we looking for from suppliers eg. new products etc.

We are always looking for ideas for new tours or to improve and refresh existing tours. This can include:

- New experiences at an existing attraction
- New attractions (Anna - Richborough Roman Fort and Amphitheatre Kent)
- Joint tickets
- Added value (stone mason tour Salisbury)
- Seasonal events (we need the information at least 12 months prior)
- Clear opening times, Clear pricing, friendly T&C's,
- Images
- Understanding that it may take time to see results

## How can Towns work with wholesalers

- Great because free
- Guiding Services and suggested itineraries (eg. GWW)
- Advise on coach parking and cost, toilet stop
- Advise on attractions, places of interest (no cost or at a supplement), indoors and outdoors
- Advise on market days
- Any historical facts or importance to include in the text

## The importance of food and drink offering from an attraction and within a tour

- As discussed, cream teas and T&C on arrival are easy and cheap options. Full afternoon tea can be expensive.
- Hotel food imperative, daily roast
- Food and drink tours, increasing in popularity, farm to fork

## 4. VisitWiltshire and Great West Way Travel Trade Updates

Please take a look at the [Travel Trade Activity Update February – May 2023](#).

The launch and distribution of the new Wiltshire Travel Trade Guide was highlighted.

VisitWiltshire is delighted that Wiltshire has been shortlisted as a finalist for Best UK Destination at the Group Leisure & Travel Awards.

**ACTION: Please vote in the Group Leisure & Travel Awards for Wiltshire to win Best UK Destination and for Longleat to win Best UK Attraction at [www.groupleisureandtravel.com/awards/vote](http://www.groupleisureandtravel.com/awards/vote)**

**Voting closes on 2 July and winners announced on 4 October.**

New domestic Official Tour Operator signed up this week – Saren Travel Group - as we continue to grow our Great West Way Official Tour Operator network (now over 100+) to help influence future

programmes. We've also been doing lots of work with the North American market with some forthcoming webinars and other opportunities.

## 5. Travel Trade Tactical Activity Plan – Priorities for Discussion

Please take a look at the revised [Travel Trade activity plan for 2023/2024](#).

### a) Autumn 2023 campaign

This part of the tactical activity plan covers activity detailed as advertising / PR / Fam visits / campaigns and the following was proposed to the group:

- A Wiltshire group fam visit for a small minibus size, quality GTO's / domestic operators for 2 days and 1 night this autumn 2023.
- An itinerary would be developed to include members of the Wiltshire travel trade group
- The itinerary would be distributed via third parties eg. Steve Reed tourism, TSE and Group Leisure as well as the VisitWiltshire database.
- A small fee would apply to GTO's / operators to attend to confirm commitment, and this would go towards the cost of the transport required.
- Wiltshire Travel Trade group members can showcase their trade business/destination on a complimentary basis eg:
  - Double rooms one night B & B – approx. 15 rooms (could be split between hotels)
  - 2 lunches and 1 dinner for approx. 15- 20 pax
  - Complimentary attraction / activity / tour tickets for 15 – 20 pax.

VisitWiltshire would coordinate, attend and manage the fam visit.

There was an overriding positive response to this proposal and therefore VisitWiltshire will start to plan this accordingly. The Greatdays Travel Group have kindly offered to partner with us to target and obtain proactive GTO's, U3A's/ Probus etc. who have good budgets. Flo will pick up with Katharine regarding this.

**ACTION: Please can members of the Travel Trade Group advise Flo if you would like VisitWiltshire to run an in-person Wiltshire small group fam visit for quality GTOs and domestic operators as part of our autumn advertising/PR / Fam campaign? If we don't hear from you by Wednesday 7 June, we will assume you are happy for this to go ahead.**

**ACTION: Please contact Flo with details of what you can offer on a complimentary basis. Please can you also advise what dates / days of the week would be preferable for this 2 day and 1 night fam (especially if you are an accommodation provider offering rooms). Please reply by Friday 9 June so we can start putting together a draft itinerary.**

### b) Exhibitions / Events

A Great West Way / Wiltshire stand at Group Leisure & Travel Show, Milton Keynes on Thursday 5 October 2023 has been confirmed, with the following stand sharers; Wiltshire, Reading, Windsor, Ascot Racecourse, DoubleTree by Hilton Swindon, Longleat and English Heritage. Cost is £850 plus VAT.

There is also an opportunity for Wiltshire trade focussed businesses to be represented by Flo at Destination Britain North America, taking place in San Francisco 7-10 September 2023.

Are you interested in attending Excursions again next year – January 2024? Further details will be released later this year but opportunities to stand share and have literature distributed is likely.

Flo will aim to attend World Travel Market as a visitor only – unless anyone is interested to stand share? Emails have been sent enquiring about stands at British Tourism and Travel Show for March 2024. If you are interested in exhibiting, please let us know.

**ACTION: If you are interested in stand sharing at Group Leisure, Excursions, BTTS or World Travel Market please get in touch. If you are focussing on the North American market then please contact Flo as we are offering a representation service for DBNA.**

### **c) Travel Trade Opportunities**

Great West Way Marketplace is being planned for November 2023. The Great West Way team is currently finalising details for the online event in-person networking day in Wiltshire and Discovery Visits. More details will be announced in due course.

The Great West Way [Travel Trade Directory](#) is being reviewed as a 5<sup>th</sup> edition. There are opportunities to have a presence in this, with a free listing, enhanced Ambassador listing, advertising, and editorial opportunities. You will shortly receive an email asking you to check your current listing and advise any amends.

**ACTION: Please get in touch with Flo by 23 June, if you are interested in any of the [Travel Trade Directory Advertising Opportunities](#) Special rates available for Ambassadors. Please ensure any amends to current listings, news and opportunities for 2024 and beyond are sent through to Flo for amending on the latest version of the directory before 30 June.**

Finally, the Milford Hall Hotel in Salisbury has recently joined the Wiltshire Travel Trade group. Welcome aboard!

### **6. Any Other Business**

The Chairman reinforced that VisitWiltshire is always in need of new information from tourism businesses/destination to help sell your products to tour operators, group organisers, wholesalers etc.

**ACTION: Please inform Flo with any new information from your tourism business/destination that can help sell Wiltshire eg. new bedrooms, new meeting rooms, new wines, new exhibitions and events, new coach parking facilities etc.**

Flo added there has been lots of interest from North American tour operators for high end exclusive, VIP products.

**ACTION: Please contact Flo with any details of Exclusive, high end, VIP, 'money can't buy' tourism product that could be sold via the North American travel trade.**

### **7. Date of Next Meeting**

**Thursday 28 September 2023, 2pm**

Please register to attend this meeting [here](#). After registering, you will receive a confirmation email containing information about joining the meeting.

We will be in touch nearer the time with activity update and agenda.

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