



Argyll & the Isles Tourism Cooperative Ltd

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AITC ACTIVITY REPORT To end April 2015

Headlines

- **Core budget of £132.5k/annum in place for 3 year programme**
- **Additional £62.9k funding secured for project activity from strategic partners**
- **Two new members recruited – 11 in total (Bute and Colonsay latest recruits)**
- **Fourth annual tourism summit took place 17 March 2015 – 150 delegates**
- **Attended ExploreGB 2015, Best of Britain & Ireland 2015 and EXPO 2015 - c100 new and strong leads**
- **Argyll Cohort of 7 have completed the Destination Leadership Executive Certificate at Napier University**
- **'Nature's Paradise' Get Wild about Argyll innovative workshop and mentoring programme rolled out in January-March in both Oban and Lochgilphead engaging 24 local operators**
- **Two new AITC branded leaflets developed with partners to add to the suite of 16 (food trail and Glorious Gardens) – both benefiting from VS Growth Fund support**
- **Joint Food & Drink industry event being planned with Food from Argyll for Nov 2015 in Oban – key event in national Year of Food & Drink programme**

AITC – BOARD & MEMBERSHIP

- Ten directors in post representing the full region (8 elected by members and representing each region; 2 co-opted)
- All directors are volunteers – Chair and Vice Chair commit a minimum of 1 day per week to AITC activity (meetings, emails, telephone calls, partner engagement)
- VisitBute and Colonsay marketing group have joined as members of AITC. The only gaps that now remain are Tiree (resourcing issues but in active discussion), Coll (no formal group on the island but keen to consider joining OLTA to ensure have collaborative support) and Explore Campbeltown (open door retained but further issues emerging)
- Sectoral membership category being introduced – active discussions underway on joint working and support for Food from Argyll, Glorious Gardens of Argyll & Bute, Artmap Argyll, Argyll & Bute Museums & Heritage Forum.

AITC FREELANCE SUPPORT TEAM

- Freelance team appointed in 2014 consisting of Development Manager; PR & Media; Web Editor and 8 development agents (7 area based and one sectoral for Get Wild initiative)
- An average of 10.5 days of freelance support available per week across the different roles/remits – 504 days per annum. This was condensed over 6 months in 2014/15.
- Pool of framework agents also available from original procurement programme

AIT SUMMIT 2015

- Fourth annual summit took place on 17 March 2015 with funding support from VS – 150 delegates
- Venue at Lochs & Glens Ardgartan Hotel, near Arrochar – newly constructed and in top 25 best hotels on TripAdvisor
- Partnership with HIT Oyster Club for dinner event on 16 March in Inveraray – 60 attendees.
- Field trip to Helensburgh area on 16 February 2015 with ten participants. Visited the Tower, Hill House, had a guided heritage walk and visited Ardgartan Forest Holidays 'Forest cabins' on return to Inveraray
- Summit theme was 'to see ourselves as others see us' – key focus on customer journey and collaboration
- Key speakers included Gordon Watson, new CEO at LL&TTNPA, VS Segmentation Team, Cathy Craig from Calmac, Marc Crothall from STA
- Break Out sessions with Robert Kidd, MacKinlay Kid; Virginia Sumsion, Food from Argyll; Stef Lauer, Wilderness Scotland and Amanda Burns, Calmac
- Introductory speech from Nicholas Ferguson prior to the first meeting of the new A&BC Economic Forum that evening – stressing the importance of tourism
- Award presented to Lochs & Glens by the Duchess of Argyll
- Programme based on interaction and networking, ability to sign up for new activity
- Feedback – 100% rated event as good/excellent; unprompted responses to 'what was the most useful thing you got out the summit' was networking and meeting other businesses

DESTINATION LEADERSHIP EXECUTIVE CERTIFICATE

- The AITC cohort undertook the Napier University Business School Executive Certificate Programme for Destination Leaders between October 2014 and April 2015 and graduate on 14 May 2015
- Four Directors (Gavin Dick, Calum Ross, Niall Macalister Hall and Dave Currie), the AITC Development Manager (Carron Tobin), the Commercial Director of Calmac (Cathy Craig) and Steven Dott of HIE formed the Argyll & the Isles Cohort
- AITC Directors and Development Manager did the course in their own time (12 course days plus travel and overnights – accommodation cost covered by HIE)
- The fee per person is funded through additional support from HIE, AITC and individual grants from Skills Development Scotland, plus financial input (and time) from each individual.
- A key element of the programme assessment is completion of a team project. The Argyll & the Isles cohort formed 2 teams and developed two related projects; one relating to developing tourism and the offer at a host community level and the other at enhancing the ability for businesses to collaborate in a disparate rural area.
- Both projects have now been presented to HIE and support is in place to progress these to the next stage.

CAPACITY BUILDING AND PRODUCT DEVELOPMENT

- 7 freelance development agents appointed in Sept 2014 who are now actively working with the local DMOs on capacity building (equates to 12 days per week (288 days from 1 Oct – 31 March; then 288 days from 1 April 2015 to 31 March 2016 – scope for similar allocation in 2016/17 but tailored to refreshed need and possible focus on sectoral groups)
- All appointees from/working in the Argyll area
- Actively supporting 12 DMOs with 2 more under review (Tiree and Campbeltown)
- Needs Analysis generated for each DMO and providing excellent comparative info on membership categories, fee levels, constitution etc

- Key needs analysis themes – volunteer fatigue (same directors for several years), dwindling or stagnating member nos; insufficient budget for proactive campaigns; need to engage wider business base (not just accommodation); out dated constitutions; unclear member benefits; groups not visible locally; social media presence variable across the region;
- Needs Analysis for each area has identified where the capacity building support is best focused and highlighting common issues where we can readily provide common approaches, training etc.
- Growing membership is an emerging priority with most areas having key gaps in current membership which they wish to address with AITC capacity building support – eg retail, activity providers, etc.
- Major programme of activity underway with each DMO tailored to their stated needs including on line member surveys in 3 areas – c 200 responses - member networking events, fam trips etc.
- 2 DMOs changing their constitutions to better reflect member needs

DMO BY DMO ACTIVITY

- HMI – paper presented at AGM suggesting options for the future. Agreed to ballot the membership on folding HMI and starting a new more dynamic and wider reaching DMO structure
- OLTA – agreed to re-establish itself as a co-operative – Oban & Lorn Tourism Alliance. Flyer issued in the Oban Times and online member survey - several new members as a consequence. Successful YOFD Growth Fund bid including a new AIT Food & Drink leaflet to add to the suite
- HOATA – agreed to undertake more member networking events at member premises and seek joint training (social media). New members secured
- IMAGE – member survey issued
- Explore Kintyre & Gigha – seeking to relaunch the group with new directors and to promote Kintyre wide events. ExploreCampbeltown have declined membership of AITC
- IJTMG – major review of member benefits, fee structure etc and online business survey – not limited to current members. New website launched (in similar style to exploreargyll.co.uk.) Several new members
- Colonsay Marketing Group – just joined AITC
- Cowal Marketing Group – focus on fam trips and Cowal Kitchens event. Concern expressed that AIT Suite of leaflets needs reviewed for local areas – keen to see accommodation on new route planner map.
- Kyles Marketing Group – focus on events and fam trips. Healthy membership levels
- Visit Bute – just joined AITC. Good AGM and networking event in April.
- Visit Helensburgh – review of current model and relationship with other groups/organisations underway - hosted Summit Field Trip in March 2015

'NATURE'S PARADISE - GET WILD ABOUT ARGYLL' PILOT

- Innovative pilot initiative developed with FCS and SNH building on the Nature's Paradise initiative and TIS guides plus utilizing Development Agent resource
- Pilot offered in Oban and Mid Argyll and 24 businesses taking part
- Training programme rolled out with a full day workshop then 1-2-1 on site mentoring to raise awareness of value of wildlife and adventure tourists, how to reach them and what is available in the local area.
- Natures Paradise Facebook page launched
- Follow up mentoring visit planned for the Autumn
- Resource pack provided to all participants to share with guests

- Additional £10.5k funding secured by AITC

TRADE FAIRS AND EVENTS

- In 2014/15 AITC attended
 - EXPO 2015 (Aberdeen – 25/26 April 2015) 65 leads
 - BOBI (Best of Britain and Ireland – NEC, Birmingham 11/12 March 2015) – limited leads
 - ExploreGB at Royal Ascot (25/26 Feb 2015) 51 leads
- Key area of enquiry is 'itineraries' based on specific criteria – either interests or accommodation type/grade
- Many travel trade are looking to get off the beaten track and seeking authentic experiences
- Significant interest noted from the 'emerging markets'
- Very active follow up compared to previous years

PR & MEDIA

- 1360 followers on Facebook and 3055 followers on Twitter
- At least one Facebook post per day with tips and advice on exploring Argyll & The Isles and linked to national campaigns – eg Year of Food & Drink, VS Brilliant Moments and STA OneWordScotland
- 3 scheduled tweets per day aimed at hooking in business and individuals to engage with us
- Sister facebook page launched 'Nature's Paradise' as part of Get Wild about Argyll
- Social media primarily pointing to www.exploreargyll.co.uk as primary source of information
- News page active on website with regular postings – sharing our own and also partners news releases

JOURNALIST FAM TRIPS

- AITC being fed fam trip enquires from journalists that VS cannot handle due to resourcing
- In April/May - Directly developed a 5 day itinerary for Frommers Travel Guides (Kintyre, Islay and Mid Argyll); Deep Sea Fishing (3 days in Oban); Telegraph summer holiday and five ferries articles (Portavadie), Times article on the Sea Eagles on Mull and Conde Nast Traveller foodie tour of the West Coast
- Increasing requests from VS to facilitate itinerary planning

EXPLOREARGYLL WEBSITE

- Web content significantly enhanced with regular 'explore like a local features' and journeys being developed
- Route planner tool being developed for 2015 season with Digital Innovation award from HIE
- Developing stronger links with local DMO web sites, Argyll and the Isles attractions and partner sites
- April 2015 monthly stats – 4661 sessions; 3863 users; 13,669 page views

AITC SUITE OF LEAFLETS

- Suite of 16 leaflets has been in full circulation for 2014 season – in Argyll and across Scotland.
- Initial print run just under 1million and additional 100k print run during the season
- Extremely positive reports from Direct Distribution on uptake outwith Argyll.
- Most popular titles in 2014 were – Oban& Lorn, Cowal, Inveraray and Kilmartin; Whisky, Castles, Museums, Clan Seats and Wildlife.
- Additional titles printed during season to accommodate demand and with support from DMOs and A&BC (Kevin Baker)

- Leaflet pack used at various events and trade fairs incl Food & Drink event at Ingleston, Scottish Bird Fair, EXPO 2014, A&BC Economic Summit and also in response to numerous email enquiries to info@exploreargyll.co.uk
- 2 titles added in April 2015 – Food & Drink and Glorious Gardens and launched at EXPO 2015 – 18 titles in series - all titles available on the website

DIGITAL TOURISM INITIATIVE

- AITC successful in securing a place on the HIE Digital Tourism programme
- B-2-B advice being provided by Dynam
- Audit of our digital media action plan for Visitor facing activity – positive feedback from Dynam
- Key focus on using digital media for member engagement and information sharing – action plan to be developed
- Programme of specialist workshops provided
- NB over 20 businesses in Argyll are taking part in this

DIGITAL INNOVATION AWARD – ROUTE PLANNER KIOSKS

- AITC successful in securing one of 20 awards across HIE.
- Total project value is £26,300 – 75% grant from HIE
- 8 branded route planner kiosks being provided and will be located at key access and decision points across the region with internet access - working with partners.
- Kiosk allows visitors to plan itineraries based on their specific interests while but also for the host venue/AITC to get feedback and build a data base
- Itinerary is mailed to user (giving us a contact for our data base and also scope to send an email for feedback after the visit)

ARGYLL AMBASSADORS

- Plans to develop an online customer care training programme similar to the Glasgow Welcomes Scheme
- Exploratory meeting with Laurence Durden at SDS.
- Project package of £18k to develop (assuming local input from AITC) – additional cost or fee per participant to deliver at £5 per person – eg 500 participants = £2500 budget requirement if being supported
- £8k available from SDS. Balance of £10k to be sourced plus decision on participant fee and associated budget.

ARGYLL & THE ISLES BAROMETER

- Barometer devised and road tested by AITC directors.
- Formally launched in May 2015 for Quarter 1 – 20 submissions within 24 hours
- Participants to update quarterly by invitation
- Seeking industry feedback on business trends relative to same period the year before
- Data collected and able to be analysed by region of Argyll, by sector

SECTORAL COLLABORATIONS

- Developing a major food and drink B-2-B event in Nov 2015 with Food from Argyll (supported by HIE, A&BC, Calmac and others)
- Partnership developed with the Glorious Gardens including a pilot 'Rhododendron' Festival in May 2015 (Growth Fund support)
- Early discussions with CHARTS on joint working to support Arts, Heritage and Culture tourism facing activity.

- Transregional collaborations with Arran, Ardnamurchan and Skye (journalist fam trips)

PARTNERSHIP WORKING

- A&B Economic Forum – Nicholas Ferguson appointed as chair and tourism has been identified as a key focus. AITC director Iain Jurgensen appointed onto the Forum in March 2015. Cathy Craig of Calmac and Neil Wells of Lochs & Glens also on the forum representing tourism interests
- AITC director on STA Board and AITC Director rep on STA Council
- AITC engaging in the new Cross Party Working Group on Tourism
- AITC engaged in newly established SG Ferry Review Group
- Continued AITC involvement in A83 Task Force/Working Group
- Continued AITC involvement in CPP activity and four area groups plus EDAP working groups and SOA
- Blog activity underway with Co-operative Development Scotland and new case study being developed for AITC
- AITC cohort have completed Destination Leaders executive certificate at Napier University with HIE and Calmac – funding support from HIE
- 2 AITC delegates attended SDI 'Wildlife and Adventure Tourism – International Markets' 2 day training event in Fortwilliam
- AITC participated in 2 day Cold Water Island Tourism event on Arran in March 2015
- AITC attended STA national tourism conference on 4/5 March 2015
- AITC directly supported the Calmac Insights event in Phoenix Cinema on 20 Feb
- AITC have a stand at and attending the Social Enterprise Summit in Inverness in June 2015 with FFA, Stramash and Comar
- SDI Smart Export programme being offered in May in partnership with AITC (NB dates may be changed).

April 2015