

YOUR GUIDE TO WORKING WITH THE TRAVEL TRADE



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INTRODUCTION

The travel trade, intermediaries such as tour operators, wholesalers, travel agents and online travel agents - play a significant role in attracting visitors to Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire, even though consumers are increasingly organising and planning their own trips directly. Working with the travel trade is an effective and valuable way of reaching larger numbers of potential travellers in global markets.

Attracting visitors to your business requires some specialist industry awareness and an understanding of all the different kinds of travel trade activity. It's important to know how the sector works from a business point of view, for example, the commission system, so that tourism products can be priced accordingly. Developing your offer to the required standard needs an understanding of different travel styles, language, cultural and culinary considerations and so on.

VisitAberdeenshire runs a comprehensive programme of travel trade activities which include establishing strong relationships with key operators to attract group and independent travel to our region.

This guide aims to provide a straightforward introduction to the opportunities available to Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire's tourism businesses, enabling you to grow your business through working with the national and international travel trade.

KEY TAKEAWAY.....

The travel trade is often thought about for the group market only, but in fact the travel trade is also used extensively for small group and individual travel.

Research by VisitBritain identified that the travel trade is looking for new bookable travel trade ready commissionable products and experiences outside of London.

WHAT IS THE TRAVEL TRADE?

The travel trade is a distribution network for tourism and travel intermediaries and the travel trade play a significant role in the decision-making process of many visitors: they help to open up new markets and encourage visitors to spend longer exploring Scotland.

Travel distribution systems vary from market to market. It is important to understand the roles of each type of travel trade distributor and how they distribute your tourism product in the markets you plan to target. The key travel trade distribution channels are:

WHOLESALEERS

Tour wholesalers are located in the consumer's country of origin and supply touring options, including transport, accommodation, tours and attractions. Wholesalers link individual tourism businesses with retailers and do not sell directly to the public. Examples of tour wholesalers are Albatross Travel; Greatdays; Trafalgar; Service-Reisen; Behringer Touristik (Germany); RIT Vacations.

TOUR OPERATORS

Tour operators offer travel at lower rates than a person or business could get by booking their travel on their own. They offer tours that buy services from different accommodation providers, attractions and transport companies. They book blocks of their inventories and can combine these services into different tours. A tour operator may sell direct to the consumer or through travel agents and may promote their tours in print or online. Examples of well-known Tour operators are Tauck Tours, CIE Tours, Trafalgar, Evan Evans, National Holidays, Superbreak.

TRAVEL AGENTS (TAs)

Travel agents sell holiday and travel products to the consumer and are based in the consumer's country of origin. They are a link to the international consumer. Travel agents sell a range of products to the consumer through storefront/walk-in locations and call centres; they generally focus on out-of-country destinations. Well-known examples of travel agents in this country are Barrhead Travel, First Choice Holidays and Kuoni Holidays (note that Kuoni is both a wholesaler and a travel agent).

INBOUND TOUR OPERATORS (ITOs)

An inbound tour operator (ITO), also known as a ground handler or destination management company (DMC), is a UK or Scottish based business which specialises in packaging and bundling programmes and itineraries for marketing and selling to the overseas travel trade. ITOs are the link between Scottish tourism operators and the overseas travel distributors that buy the products, including travel wholesalers, direct sellers, travel agents, meeting planners and event planners. ITOs can be very helpful in getting your product to market. Examples of ITOs include Abbey Tours, Angela Shanley Associates, Cashel Travel, Hello Scotland,.

ONLINE TRAVEL AGENTS (OTAs)

Online travel agents (OTAs) are the fastest growing distribution channel for travel products. They deal directly both with the consumer and tourism businesses. Consumers can purchase individual products or experiences, a specific tour or an entire holiday package. OTAs are online versions of the traditional travel agent or tour operator, acting as a bridge between consumers and suppliers (hotels, airlines, car hire companies, activity providers and visitor attractions). OTAs specialise in online distribution and have no intermediaries: they deal directly with consumers and tourism products. Well-known examples of OTAs include Expedia, Viator, Booking.com, Hotels.com, GetYourGuide and Project Expedition.

GROUP AND COACH TRAVEL

Group and coach travel broadly fall into three categories:

- **Touring Holidays:** When visitors come to Scotland for a coach tour holiday they generally book their trip via a tour operator whose role is to put together and package a mix of things to see and do, places to stay and organise the coach. Examples include CIE Tours, Shearings and Caledonian Travel
- **Day and Overnight Trips:** Visitors go on short trips of one or two days. These trips are generally from (and return to) the main urban centres and take in many of Scotland's most popular tourist attractions and sights that are not easily, or readily, accessible by public transport.
- **Group tour organisers, corporate clients and businesses, schools and social groups:** They plan their own tours for work groups, societies and special interest groups and contract with independent coach operators for the transport element of the tours.



ONLINE TRAVEL DISTRIBUTION

With changing consumer behaviour and the growth of online bookings, many traditional travel distributors such as wholesalers and travel agents are taking an online approach in addition to, or as an alternative to selling their services from a retail shop front.

Overseas wholesalers and travel agents rely on ITO recommendations, as the ITOs are based in the UK and have the knowledge of tourism products and experiences, and act as a single point of contact.

Online and traditional distribution partners have the opportunity to work both with each other, and directly with their customers and local tourism businesses who supply tourism product (e.g. accommodation, tours etc.).

It's important to know each partner's role in the travel trade and how you can benefit from your part in the distribution network. The travel trade and the distribution network are dynamic, with new players, products and experiences joining all the time.

KEY TAKEAWAY.....

OTAs can support online visibility and bookability and you can pick platforms that align with your product and the markets you wish to target. Some major online distribution platforms for activities, experiences and tours are Viator, GetYourGuide, TourRadar, and Civitatis.

ATTRACTING INTERNATIONAL ATTENTION

Overall in Scotland, 40% of tourism trips are made by Scottish residents, 30% by English and 29% from overseas (with Wales and Northern Ireland making up the balance). Within Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire, the split is 68% domestic and 32% international. International visitors usually travel for longer and spend more money than domestic visitors – in 2024, they made up 54% of total visitor spend, making this segment a highly lucrative target market.

The majority of Scotland's tourism operators concentrate on marketing their product domestically and then market to international travellers once they have succeeded in the UK.



UK DOMESTIC MARKET

- Visitors are likely to be more familiar with Scotland
- Generally marketing costs are lower
- Tourism businesses often deal with consumers directly
- Visitors likely to have simpler, shorter break style itineraries
- Generally, there are no language or cultural barriers
- Return on investment (ROI) is likely to be established more quickly

INTERNATIONAL MARKET

- Visitors may have limited knowledge of Scotland and Aberdeenshire
- Marketing costs are potentially higher, although online costs remain the same except where e.g. translation is undertaken
- Tourism businesses less likely to deal directly with consumers
- Visitors likely to have more varied itineraries due to touring or longer stays
- Language and cultural differences create additional challenges when marketing product overseas
- Entering the international market is a long-term investment and may take longer for ROI to be realised
- International markets vary considerably. Extensive research and planning is required before entering a market. Visitor needs vary in each of the markets and segments
- Travel distribution varies from country to country
- Selling your product through the international travel trade requires a commitment to working with their pricing and commission structures

KEY INBOUND MARKETS TO SCOTLAND

OVERSEAS TOURIST TRIPS

Rank Visits	Country	2024 Visits
1	USA	964,339
2	Germany	507,665
3	Ireland	327,456
4	Netherlands	297,131
5	France	244,101
6	Italy	189,156
7	Australia	184,644
8	Denmark	152,762
9	Canada	145,425
10	Spain	137,163

Source: VisitScotland 2024

OVERSEAS TOURIST SPEND

Rank by Spend	Country	2024 Spend
1	USA	£1,441m
2	Germany	£360m
3	Australia	£298m
4	Netherlands	£202m
5	France	£177m
6	Denmark	£139m
7	Canada	£135m
8	Italy	£134m
9	Ireland	£114m
10	Spain	£76m

THE BENEFITS

- Pay only on results generated
- Reach new customers and maximise occupancy
- Broaden opportunities and reduce the risks to your company of dependence on one channel
- Reach markets and customers more easily (operators and agents have influence - consumers consult them, their brochures and websites)
- Generate more repeat visits and positive word of mouth
- Third party agents handle customers until they arrive, minimising your risk or time
- Expose your company to new people, new ideas, different management practices and systems and marketing and sales approaches
- Identify like-minded local people and businesses to collaborate and co-operate with, offering more to the visitor
- Improve your growth prospects, develop more skilled and productive staff and adopt technology and best practice techniques more quickly
- It's good for the destination – helping more people find out about Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire



GETTING YOUR BUSINESS 'TRAVEL TRADE READY'

What does it mean to be a travel trade ready business?

Before investing time and money in the international and domestic markets, you need to ask yourself the following questions.

QUESTIONS

1. Do you understand the distribution systems?

Are you familiar with the role of:

- Inbound tour operators (ITOs)
- Wholesalers
- Online travel agents (OTAs)
- Group Travel Organisers
- Retailers to sell the product to visitors overseas

2. Do you have booking mechanisms in place?

Can you offer:

- Same day booking confirmation
- Confirm and guarantee the booking immediately or within 24 hours?
- Provide block space (allocations) at your property?
- Accept international bookings both direct, and via the travel distribution network (on and offline)?
- Work within tour operators' booking and cancellation policies
- Acceptance of vouchers on arrival supplied by the travel trade to their customers (known as 'free sale')

3. Do you understand the concept of commissions and net rates?

Will you:

- Provide confidential net or commissionable pricing?
- Pay commissions of up to 30% for distribution through Inbound Tour Operators / 20% for wholesalers
- Guarantee rates for 12–18 months in advance? (01 April –31 March)

4. Have you thoroughly researched markets to establish where your product fits?

Have you:

- Considered the travel styles, language and cultural differences of international and domestic travellers
- Researched if your product fits with the markets and visitor types that you are targeting

5. Are you prepared to work co-operatively with other businesses and organisations in the region

Do you:

- Work with VisitAberdeenshire, VisitScotland and VisitBritain on a range of cooperative advertising and promotional opportunities

Have you:

- Identified, or started working with complementary businesses in the area to jointly package and promote internationally.

6. Have you allocated resources and administrative support

Have you:

- A marketing budget in place?

Are you:

- Prepared to set up account (credit arrangements with the tour operator, wholesale agency or local tour operator).

7. Do you have appropriate collateral materials for your clients that is informative, targeted and culturally sensitive?

Do you:

- Have a trade sales kit that includes:
 - A trade fact sheet that gives information on their product, experiences etc.
 - Destination information including a map
 - Rate sheets with detailed trade terms
 - A gallery of hi-res images of the business

If you can answer **YES** to the majority of these questions then you are on the way to becoming travel trade ready.

UNDERSTANDING YOUR TARGET MARKETS

Understanding your target markets and visitor profiles is a vital element of your marketing strategy. Visitors from different countries and backgrounds have different needs and travel in different ways compared to domestic visitors. Not all products and experiences will be suitable for all visitors.

VisitScotland and VisitBritain have extensive research available on international and domestic visitors, their travel styles and the experiences they are looking for on a Scottish holiday.

Looking at the research available can help you build a profile of visitors who may be interested in your product or experience. You can use the research to help you identify which are the key target markets for your business.

RESEARCHING POTENTIAL TARGET MARKETS WILL HELP YOU UNDERSTAND

- Which markets are currently visiting Scotland and Aberdeenshire
- How long they stay
- What they like to do
- Who they travel with
- How they book

Remember, visitors from different countries travel in different ways. A coach group from a Women's Institute and a luxury golf visitor from the USA will both make very different choices about products and destinations and will require different services. A visitor's travel style will influence their choice of tours and activities, type of accommodation, transport and the location of their product purchases. These choices will be influenced by age, budget, cultural background and previous travel experience.

Understanding how these visitors travel and what they like to do is crucial.



KEY TAKEAWAY.....

KNOWING YOUR MARKETS

- It is important to understand that overseas markets are very competitive. Not only are you competing against companies that provide similar products, you are also competing against other international destinations.
- Selling the area and all it has to offer is often the first step in selling your product
- Identify which markets you are aiming for and then prepare a marketing plan and budget for each market you plan to target
- Carry out your research before you undertake any activity
- Tailor your product offering, your messaging, your delivery, etc. to the nuances of each market
- Always focus on building long-term relationships with the travel trade

WORKING WITH THE TRAVEL TRADE



The tourism distribution system has traditionally been very structured with clearly defined functions for each role in the chain. While this is changing, particularly due to the growth in online travel agents, it is important to first understand the traditional structure.

THE TRAVEL DISTRIBUTION LANDSCAPE

Distribution refers to the way in which consumers find out about your product and the channels they use to research it and make bookings. It is different in each country. For example, many visitors still book flights through their travel agent. They may book their accommodation online through an online travel seller (i.e. Booking.com, Expedia) and their activities direct with the operator once they arrive in Scotland.

It is important to understand the roles of each type of travel trade distributor and how they can facilitate the distribution of your product.



TOUR WHOLESALER

Wholesalers provide retailers with travel packages comprising two or more products supplied by different operators. These packages are put together in brochures (on and offline), which are then distributed to networks of retail travel agents for display in their travel agencies

Wholesalers are often located in their overseas markets and many are still reliant on UK based ITOs to develop the packages they sell for travel agents and consumers. It is essential to build good relationships with ITOs who specialise in your target markets.

Tips for working with wholesalers:

- Research – find out which markets and segments the wholesaler targets, the type of experience they sell and who their distribution partners are (e.g. ITOs)
- Keep wholesalers updated on any new developments or changes to your product
- Suggest ideas for packaging your product with complementary products in the area to make your product easier to sell
- Highlight your unique selling point (USP), the benefits of your product and the factors that set you apart from the competition
- Ensure you allow for wholesaler commissions in your rates and include concise terms and conditions. Be prepared to provide rates up to 18 months in advance

INBOUND TOUR OPERATORS

An inbound tour operator (ITO), also known as a ground handler or destination management company (DMC), is a UK or Scottish based business which specialises in packaging and bundling programmes and itineraries featuring Scottish tourism products for marketing and selling to the overseas travel trade.

ITOs have commercial relationships with a network of international & domestic intermediaries and are the link between Scottish tourism products and the overseas travel distributors that buy them, including travel wholesalers, direct sellers, travel agents, meeting planners and event planners.

They usually co-ordinate itineraries about 6-12 months in advance and require inbound rates to be supplied for the tourism calendar year of 1 April to 31 March. This is linked to the wholesaler's brochure production.

ITO's are in charge of all itinerary planning, product selection, booking all travel arrangements and working directly with suppliers.

CASE STUDY – SCANCOMING

Scancoming is an ITO based in London and has over 40 years' experience of bringing groups and FIT (Free Independent Traveller) from Scandinavia to the UK. The organisation already sends some business to Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire and is keen to expand their product portfolio so they can increase this business.

Alexandra Kuzmina, who looks after group bookings, has provided the following top tips on working with Scancoming. They need:

- Reasonable cancellation terms; clients do not like non-refundable deposits and will tend to choose hotels and restaurants that can offer some flexibility.
- Quick response; Scancoming usually gets back to clients with an offer within 24 hours.
- Set menus for groups at restaurants should be easily available, either on the website or on request.
- Kept up-to-date with any developments /changes in your offering. For example, if you are an attraction and have a new exhibition or a 'value added' experience please let Scancoming know.
- Trade rates to be available for both groups and FIT

BENEFITS TO TOURISM BUSINESSES OF WORKING WITH AN INBOUND TOUR OPERATOR

- Inbound tour operators conduct a number of activities to attract the interest of overseas wholesalers and retail agents to make them aware of the services and products in Scotland
- They also create individually tailored packages, e.g. farm-stay, self-drive, nature-based tourism and special events
- They attend trade workshops, missions and shows and act as an extension of your product marketing efforts, providing international exposure for your product
- They understand and manage foreign language, visa and legal requirements for overseas visitors
- They act as a local contact point for clients overseas and only work with international clients

TIPS FOR WORKING WITH INBOUND TOUR OPERATORS

- Research who the ITO works with in the distribution system and which markets they target to ensure your product and service is the correct fit
- Compile a sales kit with product fact sheets in PDF format, brochures and images
- Ensure information on local websites are up to date
- Provide net rates and include concise terms and conditions. Be prepared to provide rates up to 18 months in advance
- Provide information in the relevant language (online fact sheets, brochures) if targeting markets where English is not commonly spoken
- Provide ITOs with prompt (same day) turnarounds on enquiries, quotations and bookings
- Prepayments or deposits may be asked for in the early days of working together until a credit payment system is agreed
- Accept ITO vouchers and trading terms



TRAVEL AGENT

Retail travel agents sell holiday and travel products to the consumer and are based in the consumer's country of origin. They offer wide distribution in prominent shop front locations and a convenient place for travellers to make bookings and buy holidays. Many retail travel agents belong to a larger chain of travel agencies or consortia that use their combined resources to market the agency brand. In some countries, retail agencies may be operated by travel wholesalers, or may concentrate on particular market segments such as special interest or family travel. Many retail travel agents also have an online presence.

Tips for Working with Retail Travel Agents

- Register your business on the VisitAberdeenshire web site
- <https://travel-trade.visitabdn.com/>
- Register your business on VisitScotland's Travel Trade site and VisitBritain:
- <https://traveltrade.visitscotland.org>
- <http://trade.visitbritain.com/en>
- Meet retail agents and wholesale reservation agents by attending trade shows
- Establish and maintain good relationships and provide regular, relevant product updates

ONLINE TRAVEL AGENTS (OTAS)

Online travel agents (OTAs) are the fastest-growing distribution channel for travel products. OTAs now represent the second-largest travel booking channel (after direct hotel channels) in France, Germany and the UK.

OTAs specialise in online distribution and have no intermediaries: they deal directly with both consumers and tourism businesses. Consumers can purchase a product or an entire holiday package online.

Online distribution is less structured than the traditional travel distribution system. Commission levels vary, depending on how the site is operated.

Before establishing a distribution deal with any online partners, it is important to research the site, how it operates and how it will promote your product, as well as how information is loaded and updated. Many sites provide you with access to maintain and update your details. While this does provide you with control over the information on your product, it can also be very time-consuming, especially if you are featured on a number of sites. Online distributors may also run a number of affiliate sites on-selling packages: just as an ITO would to a wholesaler. It is important that you are aware of any affiliate sites and where rates may appear.

OTAs can be very effective for independent hotels, B&Bs and guesthouses who will not typically be known internationally and who might not have the expertise or marketing budgets to directly target international visitors. Working with OTAs can be a relatively low maintenance way of reaching new and international visitors.

Top Tips for Working with OTAs

- Clarify commission and inventory levels required and the level of promotion for your product
- Find out how much new business the site may generate
- Check if there are any affiliate sites that may operate in addition to the main site
- How is your information on the site maintained and updated – by you or the site host?
- How is the site promoted? Is it targeted at the trade or consumers? Are there any distribution agreements in place?
- Many OTAs do not promote the country, region or your product. They are a vehicle for rate search only
- Check the fine print for their refund policy



COACH AND GROUP TRAVEL

The coach plays a vital role in carrying thousands of visitors to destinations, attractions and hotels throughout Scotland. Coaches and groups are a significant market and for many, the most important element to building a buoyant local tourism economy and making visitor attractions into successful businesses.

COACH TOURISM AT A GLANCE

- Coach tourism contributes an estimated £675 million annually to Scotland's economy.
- Studies by the Insight department of VisitScotland indicate that around 31% of long haul visitors, and 12% of European visitors used organised coach tours as their main method of transport whilst on their trip to Scotland¹ (long haul markets - North America/Australasia)
- An average of 57% of domestic coach consumers are over the age of 55, but recent figures indicate that the age profile of organised coach tours has become more diverse with an increase of 11% in the younger (16-24) demographics
- The increase in younger passengers may be attributed to a change in consumer attitudes towards coach travel and the rise of niche tour operators who, target the backpacker market and provide a more personal experience

¹ Source: VisitScotland 'Scotland Visitor Survey Transport' 2023

Tips for working with the coach and the organised tour market

- Group and coach travel represents significant potential across a range of markets
- Coach and group travel can be booked using either direct or indirect methods i.e. a group can book directly with the product provider, or use the services of a specialist group tour operator
- The nature of group travel is changing. Groups tend to no longer be just a generic group but rather a collection of individuals travelling together based on a common interest or a common motivation for their travel
- Strong demand for culture, history, scenery and activities including walking (although there is a move from tight and stressful travel programmes in favour of relaxation)
- A group organiser is not necessarily a tour operator or travel agent – it could be the secretary of the golf club or local Women's Institute

It's essential to

- Research dedicated group travel organiser (GTO) publications and trade events.
- Ensure that reservation teams have been briefed on the terms and conditions, who the contact is for rooming list/ queries etc.
- Consider group menus to suit the clients' country of origin, e.g. French and Italians love breads and cheeses, alter the menu for groups staying longer than 1 night
- Look after the driver and the guide – they could well be the owner and will certainly be influential on future decision making

RATES AND COMMISSION

DIFFERENT TYPES

Businesses selling product through the travel distribution system, need to factor commissions into the price structure. Commissions are the fee paid to the inbound tour operator, wholesaler, online or retail agent to market, distribute and sell the product. This is their income, paying for their operation and the services they provide you.

Each level of the distribution system receives a different rate of commission. If the price of the product does not allow for these levels of payment, it will be very difficult for you to market your product through an inbound tour operator, wholesaler, online or retail agent.

When dealing with the travel distribution system, you must provide the correct rates to the applicable level of distribution system. Rates should be clearly marked as either gross (retail) or net.



GROSS RATE

= Net Rate + Agent's Commission:

The gross retail rate of a product is the amount that the consumer pays and should be consistent across all distribution channels. For example, a customer should pay the same price if they book direct, via an international travel agent or via the internet. Consumers will not purchase the product from a travel agent in advance if they know they can purchase it directly from the business at a reduced price. Agents will not promote and market the business if they know the consumer is not going to buy from them or they may endorse/promote competitors. The reputation of an ITO can be affected if there is no price parity across all media.

NET RATE

= Gross Rate – Agent's Commission:

A net rate is the gross, retail or rack rate of the product "less" the commission paid to the booking agent. It is the amount the business will receive from the agent and should be kept confidential. The net rate should include all costs and the expected profit margin.

Net rates are supplied to ITOs and wholesalers and are marked up by an appropriate amount to cover the agent's costs and commissions before the product is sold to the consumer. The end cost should never exceed the usual retail rate but if a net rate is provided to a partner or an ITO you cannot dictate the rate at which your product is sold.

EXAMPLES OF COMMISSION LEVELS

SALES METHOD	APPROPRIATE COMMISSION LEVEL	EXPLANATION
Inbound Tour Operator (ITO)	Up to 30%	A net rate providing a 30% margin is agreed with the ITO and paid once a sale is made
Online Travel Agent (OTA)	10% - 30%	A net rate providing a 10-30% margin is agreed with the OTA and paid once a sale is made
Wholesaler	20%	A net rate providing a 20% margin is agreed with the wholesaler and paid once a sale is made
Retail Travel Agent	10% - 15%	A travel agent retains 10%-15% commission once the booking is confirmed and pays the balance
Direct to Consumer	nil	The consumer pays retail rate – however the retail or gross rate should be the same as that provided to distribution partners

Please note: Information on commission levels is intended as a guide only

CREATING A TRAVEL TRADE SALES KIT

Before you start to meet with travel trade buyers to pitch your product and work towards setting up sales contracts, it's important to be prepared with all the sales materials you will need to support your sales effort.

A trade sales kit is a set of promotional material that includes all the information an inbound tour operator (ITO) or wholesaler might need in order to promote your product and to put it onto their system and sell it through their distribution networks.

A TRADE SALES KIT INCLUDES

- A trade fact sheet that communicates the experiences you offer and all information needed to sell your product
- Destination information that sets the scene
- A selection of high resolution images that showcase your product experience
- Rate sheets with terms and conditions

Remember all your material should be consistently branded, reflecting the look and feel of your existing marketing materials

WHAT TO INCLUDE IN YOUR TRADE FACT SHEET

Company Information

- **About you** - A brief overview of who you are and what you offer
- **About the tour, attraction or accommodation** - A brief introduction about your product

Tour inclusions or property facilities

- **Tours or attractions** - List the inclusions and selling points to help the travel trade understand the experience that visitors will have. This is your chance to identify your unique selling points
- **Accommodation** - List the property facilities including dining options, room types and bed configurations
- **Bookings Detail** - how the product can be booked, including phone and email details for your dedicated trade contact person if applicable
- **Features** - Highlight the features that make your product stand out - your unique selling points. Include unusual itinerary highlights, access to insider knowledge or locations, or unique interactions with people or places not offered elsewhere

DESTINATION INFORMATION

- Highlight the destination's unique selling points, how it's accessed, and how far it is from Aberdeen / Edinburgh / Glasgow
- Check the VisitAberdeenshire website for images you can use free of charge - contenthub.visitabdn.com
- Give a couple of broad itinerary examples to demonstrate how your product might fit into the buyer's programs
- Include a map in the trade kit to highlight where you are located within Scotland
- In addition to having your appropriate rate structure, it's important to also have separate rate sheets ready for retail, wholesale and ITO buyers, so you are always able to provide the right rates to the right kind of buyer



RATE SHEETS

You should ensure your rate sheets include:

- Your company name and booking or trade contact details
- Rate validity from 1 April – 31 March in line with the tourism year. Rates should also apply for the next 18 months to two years
- Child and concession rate age limits, detailing inclusive ages eligible for the child rate and any other child policy details
- Blackout dates when the products cannot be booked (e.g. public holidays)
- Definition of a group including min and max numbers
- Min and max numbers for each product type
- Optional information can be included such as opening hours and product inclusions e.g. meals, to provide an extra level of detail

IMAGES

Supplying great images conveys your product's essence and experience efficiently and effectively more than words ever could. Images are key to help to market your product. As part of your trade sales kit you should have a suite of good quality, high resolution images of your product, ideally with people in them. Trade partners will require these to promote your product.

- Select 5-10 quality images that depict all of your products and services. You will want to make sure you have an image for each room type or tour
- Save these on to a USB or create an online folder with a service like Dropbox to easily share images with trade partners

TERMS AND CONDITIONS

Clearly state all your terms relating to that sales relationship up front in a clear Terms of Trade document. This is generally supplied with rates once a travel trade buyer requests further information.



CASE STUDY - JACOBITE CRUISES

<https://www.jacobite.co.uk>

For 40 years, Jacobite Cruises Ltd has helped customers experience the mysteries and myths of the world famous Loch Ness. Each year, their friendly and professional crew entertain more than 100,000 visitors with award winning cruises and tours on board an impressive fleet of 4 cruise ships. As the only 5 star operator on Loch Ness, Jacobite offers cruises and tours from one hour to a full day and four departure points. Jacobite offers something for everyone.

Focusing on a two pronged strategy of direct sales to individuals and groups and travel trade relationships and sales, Jacobite Cruises has developed a dedicated website for the travel trade and works hard to develop and maintain added value for travel trade partners.

By registering on the dedicated web site, travel trade partners can:

- Book Jacobite Cruises at preferential agent FIT and group rates
- Book tours and cruises designed to fit with group itineraries, including products such as Urquhart Castle with admission rates included
- Submit a group enquiry for bespoke tours
- Access and download resources including tour descriptions, printable maps, agent rates and images
- Register to receive regular travel trade email updates

To further increase their profile in international markets Loch Ness by Jacobite offer a "bookable" product on a variety of international platforms such as VisitBritain Travel Shop, Viator, Get Your Guide and Expedia.

CASE STUDY - NATIONAL TRUST FOR SCOTLAND

Liz Young, National Trust for Scotland.

Working with the travel trade is very important to the National Trust for Scotland (NTS), with so many varied heritage attractions all over Scotland, and many of them perfect product for trade. NTS has year on year business growth from the sector and the relationship with the travel trade has been key to this success.

Key points are:

- Ongoing dialogue to understand trade needs and their evolving requirements
- Trade focused information such as the 'Stories of Scotland' itinerary planner, aiming to make understanding and itinerary planning easier
- Advance information, including rates
- Trade rates
- Exploiting trends in a timely fashion – Outlander, upcoming films etc
- Easy to book, central information and booking service offered to date

NTS has identified a number of key areas where understanding the travel trade has helped to manage and grow the business.

LOCATION - Working with the travel trade helps NTS to promote some of its must visit locations like Inverewe Gardens.

PRIORITY PROJECTS - NTS often has priority projects where focus needs to be on promoting a specific product or venue. Keeping the travel trade up to date with new developments increases awareness of the product.

PARTNERSHIPS - New opportunities are arising all the time and NTS is delighted that VisitAberdeenshire is highlighting reasons to visit and tour the area.



CASE STUDY - ARDOE HOUSE HOTEL AND SPA

Ardoe House actively engages with the travel trade by attending trade shows, sales missions and working with VisitAberdeenshire and VisitScotland on familiarisation trips. Through working with the travel trade, Ardoe House has seen a variety of bookings including high spend FITs, groups and incentive groups, not just the traditional bus group.

Lauren Hardie, Sales Manager at Ardoe House, feels that working with the travel trade is a great way to increase business and has outlined the following benefits.

- The trade provides the avenue to promote your product nationally and internationally to a targeted customer base. If you were to undertake this marketing activity alone it would be very costly and time consuming.
- A year-round revenue stream that provides long term business, as well as opportunities for ad hoc business when you need it.

'VisitAberdeenshire has provided opportunities for us to target the trade in unique, measurable ways. Opportunities for hosting fam trips, exhibition and event attendance have all seen our travel trade segment grow to complement our business mix. The work VisitAberdeenshire has done to highlight the area has enabled us to then move forward with selling our product to the travel trade.'



HOSTING FAMILIARISATION VISITS

This is your opportunity to have the travel trade and media experience your product first hand. Familiarisation visits ("fam visits") improve the product knowledge of the ITO, wholesaler or travel agent.

Treat a trade familiarisation visit as a sales presentation – do your research and know who is visiting, be prepared for them on arrival, ask questions, showcase your product and follow up afterwards. The fam visit might be by one agent (you might have invited them) or a group organised through VisitAberdeenshire or VisitScotland.

HOSTING A SUCCESSFUL TRADE OR AGENT FAM VISIT

BEFORE

- Understand the participants in the group – who are they, where they are from, what is their position, do they sell your product or have the potential to sell your product?
- Know their itinerary and obtain contact details – when do they arrive and depart, where the group has been and where they are going, have they experienced a competitor's product?
- Consider the available time and present your product as the customer would experience it
- Brief staff, making sure all staff are aware of the group
- Prepare information for each participant tailored to their needs



DURING

- Make sure that participants are welcomed - introduce yourself and exchange business cards
- Outline the programme while at your property or tour
- Escort the group during the fam and be a gracious host
- Give time and attention to questions and make a note to follow up any request
- Present an information kit and offer to send further information to participants
- Ask the group for feedback on your product

AFTER

- Add the participants to your contact data base
- Send a thank you email and follow up any requests for additional information
- Follow any sales lead opportunities presented by the fam
- Keep participants informed of any relevant changes or updates on your product



STEPS TO WORKING WITH THE TRAVEL TRADE



1. Know your customer

- You must know who your target customers are and how your product or service can satisfy their needs better than the competition. This relates to both the end consumer and the tour operator who will sell on your behalf
- To understand the needs of the end consumer, familiarise yourself with VisitScotland and VisitBritain research and statistics about the markets you are targeting
- Review the tour operator's website and other sources of information about them
- Find out what motivates your customer to buy. In order to make a successful pitch, you must understand your customer and their motivation for buying. Is it economic? Is it because you can offer a unique product or proposition?
If they are open to change, is this due to previously poor service from a competitor?

2. Know your product

- You must understand your product or service intimately. You should know its benefits, values and unique selling points and how it can satisfy your customers' needs better than the competition
- You should also know about complementary products in the area and the access points into Scotland and Aberdeenshire from your target market

3. Know your pricing and allocation policy

- Depending on the tour operator's requirements, you will need to give them net and/or commissionable rates as appropriate for groups and FITs or individuals, both for the current year and the forthcoming year
- Within your pricing structure, be able to demonstrate how your price represents value for money, based on what the product or service delivers relative to your competition and be specific about the ways you add value
- Be clear about how you manage your allocation for individuals and groups and what the typical 'release periods' are within your allocation contracts
- Provide information about your payment and cancellation policy

4. Before you contact potential travel trade partners

- VisitScotland and VisitAberdeenshire can help give you useful information and advice on working with the travel trade



BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS

Once you have established a business relationship with an operator, it is up to you to optimise that relationship. When you start working with a new trade partner, it is likely that the volume of business you do together will be on the low side, but with the potential to grow significantly to the mutual benefit of both parties.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- **Invest in the relationship** – invite trade partners to visit your property on a complimentary basis and provide extras when you can. They must have first-hand knowledge to sell your product with enthusiasm.
- **Keep pricing confidential** between your business and trade operator.
- **Keep your product exciting** by adding new components and promoting this in a trade newsletter - your own or one that your ITO / DMO might produce.
- **Be professional at all times** - When you make a promise to follow up with more information, follow up in a timely manner. If you don't someone else will.
- **Respect the relationship** - if you receive a direct booking from a consumer that you know came as a result of your work with a tour operator, take the booking, but remit the commission to the tour operator. This approach will go a long way towards fairness and establishing a positive reputation with your tour operator partners.

NEXT STEPS?

This guide provides you with the basics of selling through the travel trade. It is now up to you to evaluate if marketing and selling this way is for you and to implement an appropriate travel trade strategy for you and your business. As you do this, remember the following points:

- Consider the travel trade in the context of your overall business goals and capacity
- Know your markets
- Set priorities
- Draw on the experience of others
- Track and monitor efforts in order to evaluate if your travel trade contacts are working for you
- Be realistic in your expectations
- Work with other like-minded businesses – can you develop some new and interesting e.g. 3/5/7 day itineraries for your target markets - that combine the best walks, finest scenery, things-to-do, places to eat and sleep in Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire
- Research ITOs that you want to work with and explore how to get them enthused by your product and services

Remember that the travel trade is only one part of a well-rounded marketing and distribution strategy.



FURTHER INFORMATION & SUPPORT

If you'd like to keep up to date with VisitAberdeenshire's travel trade opportunities, please contact industry@visitabdn.com

USEFUL WEB SITES

VisitAberdeenshire - <https://industry.visitabdn.com/>

VisitScotland - <https://support.visitscotland.org>

VisitBritain - <https://trade.visitbritain.com>

Independent Tour Operators Association - www.aito.com/

Scottish Destination Management Association - www.scotland-sdma.org.uk

Scottish Enterprise- www.scottish-enterprise.com

Scottish Tourism Alliance - <http://scottishtourismalliance.co.uk>

UK Inbound - www.ukinbound.org



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