

WAKE UP TO WINTER



Greening Scottish Tourism : Best Practice Case Studies

Team up: Bridgend Hotel and Islay Birding, Islay

Islay is one of the best places in Scotland for winter wildlife watching, when it becomes home to thousands of geese from Greenland. It is also a great place to see other wildlife including red deer and otters. Islay Birding, a wildlife guide and tour operator, offers packages for wildlife enthusiasts, including special “goose fest” deals. These packages include seeing the geese at close quarters and also visiting a distillery. A range of accommodation providers are used, one of which is the Bridgend Hotel. Jeremy Hastings of Islay Birding provides the customers, and the Bridgend Hotel provides the special rates. “It’s a win-win situation” says Mr Dudley of the Bridgend. He is busy during the week with business clients who are working on the island, but the wildlife watchers help to fill the otherwise quiet winter weekends.

www.bridgend-hotel.com
www.islaybirding.co.uk



Montrose Basin



Glen Coe

Top tips!

- Promote short breaks and special offers.
- Tell prospective visitors why your area is special in winter.
- Find out which visitor attractions are open in winter, along with any special events and promote these along with your own business.
- Promote local walks that are attractive in winter.
- Find out about winter wildlife watching in your local area. Check out www.wildlife.visitscotland.com or see VisitScotland’s wildlife brochure.
- Work out what makes for a good winter experience- warmth, cosiness, hot drinks and cakes...
- Plan indoor activities for guests or offer activity packages with local providers.
- Encourage local attractions and services to open.

The Tourism and Environment Forum is grateful to the tourism businesses that have contributed to the development of this guide, and to all those businesses who have allowed their photographs to be used. All other photographs copyright VisitScotland/ Scottish Viewpoint.

The Tourism & Environment Forum is a partnership of public and private organisations, set up to promote sustainable tourism in Scotland. Sustainable tourism takes into consideration not only the economic benefits of business, but also the environmental and community impacts and benefits. The Forum is funded by VisitScotland, Scottish Natural Heritage, Scottish Enterprise and Highlands and Islands Enterprise. The case studies in the leaflet, along with more information on sustainable tourism, are available on the Tourism and Environment Forum’s website www.greentourism.org. Contact the Tourism and Environment Forum on enquiries@greentourism.org.uk or on 01463 723012.

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What’s this about winter?

This short guide looks at some examples of best practice, where tourism businesses are tapping into the growing winter market. We hope that it will inspire others to follow suit.

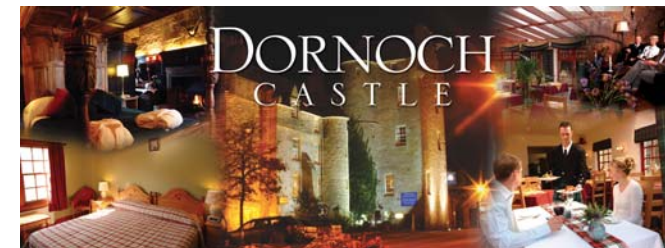
Winter opening can not only increase your income, but if good service is offered it can also generate bookings for other times of year. It enables you to retain your staff all year, as well as bringing visitors to your local area - good for your business, good for staff and good for the local economy. In some places tourism businesses also offer services that benefit the local community throughout the winter.

Scotland’s “Tourism Framework for Change”, the new policy for the tourism industry, sets two challenges. These are that Scotland should be established as Europe’s most sustainable destination by 2015, and that the revenue return should increase in real terms by 50%. Achievement of both these targets could be helped by more accommodation providers staying open in winter.

But the task is not easy. In many areas the approach is to close down in winter, so visitors are currently left with few choices in terms of services and attractions to visit. On the plus side, walks and wildlife are available all year round. In fact, Scotland’s landscapes can look at their most impressive in winter, dusted with snow. Winter wildlife can be equally spectacular- what can beat seeing thousands of geese coming in to roost at Caerlaverock or Montrose Basin, or the sight of red deer on low ground?



Cluanie Inn



Work that mailing list: Dornoch Castle Hotel, Dornoch

The Dornoch Castle Hotel is buzzing in winter, with 60% occupancy rates in January and 67% in February. So how is this achieved?

Colin Thompson swears by his database management and sheer determination. Over the past five years a large mailing list of over 4500 British and 4500 overseas names has been built up. This database is carefully worked with only the British names targeted for the low season. E-mail is fast, easy and cheap, but not nearly as successful as mailshots using postcard offers. People stick a postcard on the fridge and come back to it later- an e-mail is soon lost in a full inbox.

The hotel will shortly launch its on-line booking service, and e-mail marketing will be matched to those clients who are regular

computer users. Newspaper and brochure advertising is rarely used, although the hotel does some selective magazine advertising for the summer golf market.

Pricing is important as the winter market is very price sensitive. Offers are tailored to what clients have done before. If the client is from London, and wants weekend breaks then that is the offer they are sent. Price is similarly structured.

The quality of marketing materials is also crucial. Last year’s rather ordinary looking winter brochure was replaced this year with a much more attractive one. Coupled with more attractive pricing, this new brochure is credited with doubling January’s turnover over last year.

All is not easy in promoting the winter season however, with the weather being a key issue. Variable weather forecasting, and broad brush news reports overstating the impact of the weather on the roads, can easily put off potential guests from travelling north.



Walkers - West Coast

www.dornochcastlehotel.com



**Put on events:
Bosville Hotel Portree**

There is always something happening at the Bosville Hotel in Portree - whatever the time of year. Apart from the more obvious winter events of the festive season and Valentine's Day, gourmet weekends in February and March are proving popular. The Bosville is famed for its food, being winner of the Scottish Restaurant of the Year award in 2004/05 and then a finalist in the Scottish Thistle Awards in the Flavour of Scotland category. This is capitalised on, with resident chef John Kelly giving demonstrations of how to cook local Skye shellfish, not to mention gourmet dining in the evenings, followed by live music in the bar. Live music is a regular feature in the bar and is good for pulling people in.

The hotel always makes the most of local events, with special offers available to compliment these. Activities across the island are advertised throughout the hotel, to encourage people to stay an extra night or to entice people back.

The website is an important marketing tool, with a key feature being the headlines. The hotel is able to change these in-house to highlight offers and events. Those phoning the hotel are also told about events by a pre-recorded message whilst waiting to be put through. Monitoring of visitors has recently been introduced, and visitors are asked which time of year they are interested in so that they can be mailed specifically about events at that time.

Throughout the autumn and winter, three night bargain breaks are promoted. Prices of short breaks are varied, with different offers for different groups. "People love the idea of an offer, and will respond to an offer even if the price is not much reduced", says Mrs Macleod of the Bosville.

www.bosvillehotel.co.uk



Bosville Hotel

**The first step- stay open!
Distillery Guest House and Cottages, Fort William**

Unlike many accommodation businesses in Fort William, the MacLeans at the Distillery Guest House are open all year. With ten bedrooms and a further four self catering cottages to maintain, they just cannot afford to let bookings drop in the traditionally quiet winter months. And although they are at the foot of Ben Nevis, they cannot rely on winter snow sports alone to keep their occupancy high.

This is their first year of winter offers, and the results have been so good that they will definitely be doing more in future years. Their offers run from November to February (excluding the festive season) and change regularly depending on demand.

The rates for the four cottages are much reduced out of season and they can even be let on a nightly basis. Inclusive heating costs and facilities for walkers and cyclists also make them attractive as winter lets.

www.stayinfortwilliam.co.uk



Red Deer

**Short breaks and winter wildlife are winning ingredients:
Press Mains Cottages, Berwickshire**

The Edmondsons at Press Mains Cottages in the Borders have always stayed open all year. In the low season the majority of their business comes from the short break market, helped by their close proximity to the Central Belt and the north of England. This is business well worth having. This February they have taken around £2500 in their four cottages, which more than covers their costs. And the trend is on the up, with a steady increase in winter bookings.

The Edmondsons are also making the most of the resources on their farm by capitalising on local wildlife, a year-round attraction. CCTV cameras have recently been set up over a number of local wildlife sites and pictures of badgers, squirrels, roosting bats and nesting birds (depending on the season) can be seen from the comfort of the double glazed, centrally heated cottages. The cameras are already making a difference to cottage occupancy figures.

Whilst not every accommodation provider can offer CCTV facilities, bird and squirrel feeding stations can be a big hit with winter visitors, adding a memorable close encounter with wildlife.

The Edmondsons are members of the Green Tourism Business Scheme and have gained the silver award. They are strongly committed to making their tourism business environmentally friendly, alongside protecting and enhancing the countryside around the farm and cottages. They are also members of Wild Scotland, the association of wildlife tourism operators that promotes sustainable wildlife tourism in Scotland.

www.watchbadgers.co.uk

**Work the winter walkers:
The Cluanie Inn Glenmoriston**

The Cluanie Inn in Glenmoriston is open right through the year, and discounts online bookings heavily in the off-season, knowing that guests will also then spend money on food and drink. Winter income is particularly welcome, as it helps to cover the ongoing heating bills. In the past the Airleys have tried three nights for the price of two offers. As most walkers are coming for the weekend however, they have found that it is easier to discount the price of the room.

Staying open all year has the added bonus that staff are retained all year round, with the benefits from continuity which that brings. In such a remote location, where local staff are not easily found, retention is a key issue. The hotel also provides services for the local community by staying open, providing meals for the passing trade, a small petrol station and tourist information services. A handy location on the road to Skye also makes it a popular meeting venue all year round for various organisations.

The thirteen bedroom hotel is particularly popular with climbers, given the proximity of a whole host of Munros. They therefore provide the key services needed for those enjoying the outdoors in the winter- a big open fire, a place to dry wet clothing and climbing gear, and hot food and drinks in the afternoon when people return from the hill. The latter can be hard work, but customers definitely welcome their hot soup and toasts.

Others come not for the climbing but for a luxury winter weekend away from it all, complete with sauna and jacuzzi bath. In fact the luxury rooms are the best sellers all year round.

The hotel's website includes a "pop up" asking people to sign up to an electronic newsletter. This includes details of special events and activities, low season room rates and last minute reader offers- so out of season offers are much more prominent than on many websites.

www.cluanieinn.com

**Offer packages- make life easy:
Rosegrove Guesthouse, Grantown-on-Spey**

The six bedroom Rosegrove Guesthouse near Grantown-on-Spey has been experimenting with off-season offers for the first time this year and will certainly be doing more of the same next year. From October to Easter they offer discounted prices, with a greater reduction of 20% for people who stay three nights or more. Bookings are well up on the previous year and whilst the reduced prices mean they are not making so much money, the bookings are covering the running costs. A good holiday experience should also lead to repeat bookings at other times of year.

The Walters family, who own the guesthouse, are also putting a lot of thought into what guests can do in the winter time. For the outdoor enthusiast there are plenty of opportunities, with the guest house having the Cairngorms on its doorstep. For those who are not so adventurous, the cosy lounge with open fire, lots of books, games, and small bar welcomes those returning from a short walk. Plenty of toys are available for those visiting with young children, who may only manage short periods of time out in the winter weather. Tea and cakes are a welcome extra to tide guests over to dinner time.

As members of both the Walkers Welcome and Cyclists Welcome schemes, the guest house is geared up to cater for walkers and cyclists in all seasons. Facilities for drying wet gear are crucial, as is a lockable store for bikes.

Few local indoor attractions are open in the winter so the Walters are busy arranging warm and dry activities for guests. Packages can be organised for groups of six or more coming for a minimum of three nights. Options include car treasure hunts, sight seeing tours using a local tour operator, golfing and other outdoor activities, or a trip out with a local wildlife expert. They can also arrange transport to and from three local restaurants, to allow for full relaxation. And to maximise convenience, the Walters will even collect guests from the train station or airport.

All guests are sent a Christmas card along with a letter featuring off-season offers. Many guests have returned as a result of this promotion. In the future, summer guests will be given details of off-season promotions with their bill, and this will save on postage costs.

www.rosegroveguesthouse.com



Crathes Castle

**But what can visitors do?
Crathes Castle, Grampian**

Year round opening is here to stay at Crathes Castle in Grampian, having started as a trial only two years ago. The first year was assisted financially by Scottish Enterprise Grampian. From November to March, the National Trust for Scotland-owned castle is now open from Thursday to Sunday, and the castle grounds, the shop and restaurant are all open daily.

Whilst the castle entry fees are just enough to cover costs, the "secondary" spend in the shop and restaurant makes the whole operation profitable. As a result, there are now five full-time equivalent posts through the winter that did not previously exist. And of course it means that winter visitors to the area have a special attraction to visit.

A lot of effort was put into press coverage the first year of winter opening, and word has got about. Visitor numbers have been maintained through the second season, with a mix of those on holiday in the area, day trippers and locals visiting.

The National Trust for Scotland is working hard to reposition this property as a year round destination, putting in a new restaurant and reviewing the catering provision. To broaden the appeal they are also busy constructing an aerial trekking course- Skytrek - an assault course high in the trees that will be open all year.

www.nts.org.uk



Rosegrove Guest House

