



The Standard

www.assc.co.uk

Spring 2009

Customer Feedback
Quality Assurance
ASSC Conference



A Word from the Chairman



The self-catering sector is a welcome ray of light in all the current gloom and doom. We may be poised to do very well this year because, driven by the Euro exchange rate and uncertainties over carriers/travel companies, UK visitors seem to be choosing to stay in this country. However, ongoing job losses may yet affect this, and the bigger picture will take time to emerge. Other countries are in recession too, but hopefully the events and marketing around Homecoming Scotland, together with favourable exchange rates, will attract more overseas visitors.

So in 2009, we may well find ourselves booking in visitors who are new to self-catering in Scotland, or who were last here 20 years ago as a child on a family holiday. It is a great chance for us to demonstrate how self-catering has developed in recent years, but also more significantly, to build relationships with these new visitors so that they come back again. The quality of the welcome and 'going the extra

mile' will be especially important.

We have noted that some members have been growing unhappy with Quality Assurance, and we have taken up issues raised with VisitScotland. This comes at a fortunate time, as VisitScotland is currently investigating how the Quality Assurance scheme will look in the future with a series of industry workshops. VisitScotland are certainly listening, and in addition we are arranging a self-catering focus group to meet after Easter to take this forward.

Difficulties being experienced in the Bed and Breakfast sector in interpretation of the new Fire Regulations have resulted in an early review of the Small Sleeping Accommodation Regulations. We will be represented on the group looking at this, because many of the emerging issues are common to both sectors. The group meets the Minister in March. Members should however continue to do their Fire Risk Assessments.

We are working with the Assessors as they analyse the data collected for the 2010 Rates revaluation. Meanwhile, members should remember that they should claim 100% relief in 2009/10 where the

total rateable values for all businesses that they run in Scotland comes to a total of less than £8,000. There is a sliding scale of relief up to £15,000.

The ASSC is approaching 600 members, and now market some 3,000 properties on our Embrace Scotland website. The website is working well, and has attracted some 20,000 new visitors in the past calendar month. In addition to the usual racking in London and elsewhere, we are also sending out a considerable numbers of directories in response to requests. Successful marketing costs money, and in a nutshell, the more members we have, the more we can do to promote everyone. We are therefore boosting recruitment activity this year, and will be in touch with members about this.

We are also planning some area meetings during the coming year, as we know that self-caterers like to get together to have a chat and compare notes.

I hope that bookings are going well for you this year, and that we are in for as good a year in self-catering as many experts predict.

David Smythe
Chairman

Discussion Forum on ASSC Members' Website

One of the benefits of membership of the ASSC is access to the exclusive Members' Area of our Association website, www.assc.co.uk. All our services and information for Members are focussed here, including the popular Discussion Forum. Recent topics have included:

- A heated debate about the pro's and con's of ASSC's commitment to **Quality Assurance**.
- Preferred and recommended systems for taking **online payments** for bookings.
- Unsolicited bills for your use of **images on websites** - are they a scam or legitimate business?
- Is **TripAdvisor** a help or a hindrance, for holidaymakers as well as for accommodation providers?
- The role of VisitScotland QA when a customer makes an unreasonable **demand for a refund**.



Embrace the Future...

and build on 30 years of ASSC success

David Smythe welcomed everyone to the Conference and introduced Iain Herbert, Chief Executive of The Scottish Tourism Forum, who gave a presentation on 'Realising Our True Potential: converting strategy into pounds'. He considered in some detail the challenges of harnessing the power of partnerships, including STF membership, trade associations such as the ASSC, the Area Tourism Partnerships and the new Destination Management Organisations.

Iain outlined how the industry and STF are in the process of reviewing the 'Tourism Framework for Change' ten-year strategy document. In future, this will focus on:

- Transport and infrastructure
- Marketing
- Skills
- Investment

He believed that there would be many ways for the industry to engage with this review, and encouraged the ASSC and its members to continue to play an active part on behalf of the self-catering sector.

The conference participants then enjoyed a series of three practical workshops:

How to Manage your Online Reputation - Rene Louper

Ex-hotelier now turned Tourism consultant Rene Louper gave us vital information on connecting with our online customers and enhancing our reputation with them, via blogging, using

websites such as Tripadvisor, Youtube, Facebook, and other tourism related sites. Also he showed us how to set up Google Alerts for that all-important feedback.

Maximizing the Benefits of Networking – James Fraser

James Fraser explored ways in which self-catering operators can get the most out of strengthening their networking links and activities relatively simply and cost effectively. Participants left this session with specific networking actions which they could use to enhance their prospects and enjoyment of running a successful self-catering business.

ASSC Conference



Reinvigorate your Website for Increased Occupancy – Robert Kennedy

Robert Kennedy gave us 10 actionable steps to take to get our websites ahead in this competitive market. Case studies and examples illustrated the points made and showed us how to make use of his jargon-free advice.

To close the conference, Alan Rankin of Visit Aviemore Destination Management Organisation gave a short presentation about how businesses in Aviemore are working together to promote the area.

Current Issues for ASSC

A selection of items from current ASSC business

Quality Assurance — QA continues to be a hot topic for the ASSC and its members. We are lobbying VisitScotland to put more effort and money into promoting their QA scheme to visitors, so that customers know how to find the quality they are seeking.

Rates Revaluation — We continue to keep an eye on Rates Assessors to try to ensure that all decisions are fair, and consistent across the country.

Membership — ASSC has a strong and growing membership, and 2009 will see a concerted effort to include more self-caterers from all corners of the country. At the same time, we will be working hard to maintain and improve the range and quality of member services.

Homecoming Scotland 2009 — As 2009 continues we will be joining in the Homecoming Scotland activities wherever possible. This includes a regular 'homepage highlight' on our website, which will feature every member over the course of the year. We will promote self-catering as one of the best ways to really feel 'at home' when visiting Scotland.



Listening to our Visitors

A new booklet just published by Tourism Intelligence Scotland offers a practical guide on how to use feedback to improve your business.

Customer feedback is essential for your business, and the guide can help you to develop new ways to find out what customers think. Success stories show what can be achieved and how a business can transform itself and the area where it is located.



It looks at why both good and bad feedback helps grow your business and why you should actively look for it. And not just individual businesses. It is just as important to know what people think of your area too.

Word of mouth really does matter and visitors will always talk about their experiences. It's vital that you are the first person they talk to. The rapid growth in review websites and social networks has transformed what was once just a

chat in the pub into a worldwide forum. Glowing praise now has a global audience and harsh criticism can be exposed to the masses. Harnessing and using both is key to a profitable business, particularly as customers' tastes become more refined and expectations get ever higher.



Above all, the guide will show you how to make the most of customer feedback, focussing on tips for how to gather and use it. Although many approaches are referred to as examples within the guide, it is important that you consider all of the available options before developing the right approach for your business.

The guide has been developed by a group of tourism industry representatives in partnership with Scottish Enterprise, Highlands and Islands Enterprise and VisitScotland; to lead the way in helping tourism businesses maximise their greatest asset – their customers.

Ask and you shall receive - so when visitors are talking, make sure it is you who is listening...

If you have registered for previous TIS publications, you should receive this one automatically. If not, see their website, where you can also find details of a series of FREE workshops to accompany the launch of this booklet:

www.tourism-intelligence.co.uk

Review 
Websites 

MyCottageHoliday

A recent new entrant into the customer review website market is MyCottageHoliday.co.uk.

Aiming to steal a march on TripAdvisor for self-catering in the UK, it is attracting considerable media attention.

The website's editor, Andy Brown, said "Our objective is to encourage holidaymakers to share their holiday cottage experiences so that more people self-cater in the knowledge that the product they will be buying is of a good and consistent standard. Ultimately we would like anyone considering booking a UK self-catering holiday to check our website before they make the booking, to reassure themselves that the cottage is as described and that they will get what they expect."

TripAdvisor

Meanwhile, many will be aware that at the moment, TripAdvisor does not officially list reviews of self-catering accommodation.

However, at the recent Tourism Innovation Day in Musselburgh, one of their senior managers, Severine Philardeau, announced that it is on its way. Already covering 'holiday rentals' in the US, TripAdvisor will be opening to the sector in the UK soon. The ASSC has offered to help them get their offering 'right' for the UK markets, and even to trial it with some Scottish self-catering.

Once it's available, you can guarantee visitors will use it to find out about you, and to praise you (what else?!)



Hallmarks of Sustainable Tourism

Environment

- Reducing carbon emissions and waste
- Conserving water
- Protecting biodiversity

People

- Ensuring safety and security
- Informing staff and visitors of their environmental impact
- Helping to restore people's health and wellbeing

Community

- Getting involved with and enhancing the local community
- Promoting local culture, crafts, food and customs
- Prioritising goods and services from the local area

Infrastructure

- Building in improvements to enable sustainable living
- Promoting lower impact and smarter logistics
- Encouraging people to travel to and from the business in the most sustainable way possible

Finance

- Deliver solid returns over the long term
- Long term vision and commitment to the business and the local area
- Communicating your credentials to build a recognised brand

From a workshop by Forum for the Future presented at the Tourism Innovation Day 2009.

www.tourisminnovation.com

www.forumforthefuture.org



WTM WORLD RESPONSIBLE TOURISM DAY - 11 Nov 09

WHAT ARE YOU DOING?

Travel and tourism companies and organisations across the world are under increasing pressure to work more responsibly. Consumers are demanding it. Communities are pushing for it. The organisers of WTM WRTD believe we have to show that we are making a real effort.

WTM World Responsible Tourism Day on 11 November 2009, is the only global day of action of its kind. It is being supported by the UN World Tourism Organization and leading industry associations. The day is vital – for business, for profitability and for our planet. It means taking care of a world that we seek to promote to travellers, preserving our heritage and cultures, and taking into account the views and needs of local communities.

Consumers are increasingly demanding a more responsible, caring travel industry. People's attitudes are changing rapidly – and the industry must listen. Businesses simply cannot afford not to take responsible tourism seriously. But it may also have real commercial benefits for your business too!

It could:

- Increase your company's profile, regionally and globally
- Attract more customers
- Even improve profitability

This is a chance to speak out as one voice, demonstrating that responsible tourism is the only means of securing our future. Taking responsible tourism action year-round as part of your business plan makes sense for you ... and for the future. Get involved with WTM WRTD!

WTM has created an official WRTD 2009 logo, which everyone wishing to participate should apply for now. You can use it on all sales and marketing and as part of your press and PR campaign: www.wtmwrtd.com

Discover the real Scotland!



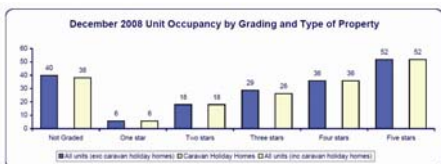
Over 3000 *quality assured* holiday properties all over Scotland

Last Minute and Late Availability

Extensive information to help you find out about Scotland and plan your visit

Feedback blog at www.enjoyselfcatering.co.uk

www.embracescotland.co.uk



Accommodation Occupancy

"We're always trying to attract new recruits from all areas of Scotland, but in particular at the moment we need businesses in **Ayrshire & Arran, Argyll, Perthshire, Skye and Orkney**," says Eileen Henderson of TNS Travel & Tourism.

She is talking about property owners willing to take part in the Scottish Accommodation Occupancy Survey. In return for filling in a simple email or paper form each month, you will receive reports showing how your own occupancy rates compare with the averages for similar businesses in your area and across Scotland.

This information will cost you nothing except the time it takes to fill in the monthly forms. The reports provided can be invaluable in a variety of situations, such as dealing with banks, planning, and rating authorities. Hundreds of businesses in Scotland already benefit from this feedback.

They treat the data as strictly confidential, and individual participants are not identified in any way to outside bodies.

If you would like to take part, and benefit from professional benchmarking, please contact:

Eileen Henderson, TNS Travel & Tourism, 19 Atholl Crescent, Edinburgh EH3 8HQ
0131 656 4000
occsurvey@tns-global.com



Quality Assurance



All the properties which the ASSC includes in its online and print marketing are graded to the UK 'common standard'. This was a decision agreed by the membership two years ago, and one which we feel offers a high degree of confidence to visitors who book with our members. We are not alone, as there are now many other groups of tourism businesses who insist on 100% quality grading.

Internet Reviews

However, things are changing; in particular, the number of ways that visitors employ to assess a property has grown. In pre-internet days, all we had was the tourism board Quality Assurance scheme, and one photo in the local accommodation guide. How simple life was then! Nowadays, we still have the Quality Assurance scheme as a valuable independent assessment, but in addition we have our own websites, displaying carefully chosen words and lots of nice photos, 360 degree views, and even videos on YouTube. We may have blogs, or publish visitor feedback on our website, or include links to sites like TripAdvisor. Some of us

may just be beginning to 'tweet!' The point is that the Visitor now 'triangulates' all the sources of information available before making a decision on where to stay.

VisitScotland Action

Independent Quality Assurance remains important and central. In recognition of the changes outlined above, as well as in the things that visitors expect as 'givens', VisitScotland are currently conducting a series of industry workshops to see where the Quality Assurance scheme should go over the next few years... beyond Common Standards. One of the hot topics is whether or not there should be a visit every year, or whether every other year is sufficient. Self-caterers will be invited to take part in sector-specific focus groups to help shape the way forwards.

Meanwhile, and ahead of any changes, we are demanding that the existing scheme be promoted much more strongly by VisitScotland, so that visitors are reminded to look for the stars, and recognise their importance and value.



Homecoming Scotland is Happening Now!

From Burns' Night to St Andrew's Day, the 'Year of Homecoming' will be hard to miss this year. Whether you are an enthusiastic participant or a reluctant sceptic, don't ignore it!

Many visitors to Scotland in 2009, especially from overseas, will be coming because they have heard about Homecoming Scotland. Make sure you know what is going on in your area, and have leaflets and information about events available in your properties.

Don't let their holidays die of ignorance! homecomingscotland2009.com

The Top Ten Reasons to Join the ASSC

Representation – The ASSC lobbies on behalf of self-catering on national and local issues with consultative bodies, local and central government, VisitScotland, its Quality & Standards Scheme and visitscotland.com, the Scottish Tourism Forum, Scottish Enterprise, and many more...

Real value for money – Membership starts at literally a few pence a day. Alongside many comparable packages of business services, our subscription rates are extraordinarily low for the benefits offered.

Advice, News and Networking – Our regular ASSC e-news, print magazine, annual conference and exclusive members' website keep you informed and in touch throughout the year. Our regularly updated Guidance Sheets cover a wide range of topics and trends affecting the self-catering industry.

Opportunities for exchanging views – An online Discussion Forum allows members to engage actively with each other at any time, and to exchange views and best practice.

Marketing Channels and Support – For members who take the marketing option, we can boost your bookings 24 hours a day. You have complete control over your Property Page(s) on our popular and well publicised consumer-facing website, www.embracescotland.co.uk, to promote your business and bring you extra traffic. We promote the Embrace Scotland brand and website on your behalf throughout the year. We also offer extra opportunities for increased exposure of your accommodation via special offers and promotions.*

Directory – A free line entry and an opportunity for a display advert (at modest extra cost) in our full-colour annual brochure promoted throughout the UK and overseas.*

ASSC Logo – The right to use the ASSC logo to add prestige and quality assurance to your branding.*

Free Business Advice – Legal Helpline for telephone advice; Tax Watchdog offering initial accountancy advice; Advisory visits for members considering the Green Tourism Scheme.

Have You Renewed?

Spring is 'renewal time' at the ASSC, and every Member receives an email reminding them to download *and pay (!)* their online invoice.

It's easy, it's quick, but does everyone do it by 28th February?

Don't lose out: **Renew** your membership, or **join now**, to enjoy a full year's worth of all the benefits described above.

Phone Jen or Eleanor
01866 822122

Insurance – Custom-made insurance policies at keen rates for self-caterers, covering buildings, contents, public liability and cancellation.

Discounted Supplies – Our list of recommended specialist suppliers to the trade includes many who offer discounts to members to save you £££s.

* Only available as part of the *Membership with Marketing* package to quality assured businesses.

Membership Can Increase Your Profits And Decrease Your Costs

Meet the Committee

Introducing a new volunteer elected to the Committee at the 2008 AGM.

Allan Spence

Allan was born and brought up in Aberdeenshire and joined the Bank of Scotland on leaving school. He served for 35 years in various branches throughout Scotland before retiring as Manger Business Banking in Lerwick, Shetland.

Allan now runs five three bedroom holiday lodges situated high on the hillside overlooking Drumnadrochit and Loch Ness, in partnership with his wife Agnes and with help from Andrew, their youngest son.



The family live near enough to be on hand but far enough away not to be intrusive, and Allan always ensures that guests receive high levels of quality and customer care.

Allan knew the importance of cash flow and saw self-catering as offering this. He also thought it would have the flexibility to enable him to pursue other interests and scale down to retirement. He ruefully admits to complete accuracy on the first point but on the second the discovery of demand in the short break market all the year round has meant that a seven day week is often the norm.

Allan is also Finance Director of Drumnadrochit Chamber of Commerce and Tourist Association (VisitLochNess Ltd).

New Members

The ASSC would like to take this opportunity to extend a warm welcome to the following new members who have joined us in recent months:

Christine & David Baker	Ballachulish
Claire Boyd & Helen Maclean	Inverness
Catherine Brady	Inverness, property on Isle of Lewis
Ian & Sue Brash	Tranent
Wendy & Geoff Bush	Perth
Ailsa & Iain Campbell	Crieff
Jean Campbell	Barra, property in Connell
Kenneth Campbell	Edinburgh, property in Ballindalloch
R.A. & J.H. Campbell-Gibson	Kilmelford
Aileen Caughie	Stranraer
Lesley Cherry	Lairg
Louise Connolly	Comrie
Mr & Mrs A. Crawford	Dalgety Bay
Ian Dawson	Forres, property in Isle of Colonsay
Tracy Drysdale	Dunbar
Shona Duthie	Peterhead, property in Cullen
Barbara Elborn	Newcastleton
Malcolm & Margaret Evans	Auchterarded
Catriona Falconer	Inverness
Michele George	Glasgow
Janet & John Grover	Newtonmore
Jill Hart	Melrose
Andrew & Gillian Hughes	Aberdeen, property in Ballater
Susanne Hume	Linlithgow, property in Rowardennan
Margaret Ingram	Ballachulish
Joy Jardine	Innerleithen
Ian Keir	Dunblane
Patricia Keith	Castle Douglas
Doug & Sheena Lawson	Dingwall, property in Inverness
Mr & Mrs E. Ley-Wilson	Inverness
Fiona Lyle	Dunblane
Fionn MacCumhail	Pitlochrie
Diana MacKie	Isle of Skye
Barbara & Toby Marshall	Carnwath
Chris Menzies	Pitlochry
Trish Millar	Selkirk
Clive & Rosemary Moore	Muir of Ord
Jenny O'Keefe	Drymen
Sandy Orr	Benderloch
John & Katy Pilling	Berwick upon Tweed
Quarriers Village	Bridge of Weir
Olivia Reynolds	Dunbar
Simon Richards	Lairg, property in Ullapool
Martin Robinson	Burnley, property in Tain
Shehbaz Sarwar	Edinburgh
Sue Smith	Glenshee
Calvert & Margaret Stinton	Worthing, property in Alness
Debbie Strang	Grantown on Spey, property in Shetland
Gary Watson	London, associate
Anne West	St. Monans
Kathleen Yates	Pitlochry

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