



The Standard

www.assc.co.uk

Spring 2008

EmbraceScotland

Green Tourism

Partnership



A Word from the Chairman



The exciting news for the Association is the launch of our new visitor marketing website www.embracescotland.com. We are very pleased with the new fresh look and feel, and have high expectations for its performance in terms of web traffic and resulting bookings for members. This represents a significant investment for the Association, not only in money, but in human resources. We have appointed Lynn Pitt as our part-time marketing assistant, who will help keep the website up-to-date, amongst other things. I would like to thank everyone involved in getting this project up and running.

It is going to be interesting to see how domestic tourism goes this year. There is considerable media speculation about how the 'credit crunch' may translate into more people holidaying at home. I am not sure that it is as simple as this, and while self-catering holidays provide great value, we have to remember that Scotland is not a cheap destination. It may be that we receive more UK visitors, but they may well choose to eat out less and visit fewer paid-for attractions when they are here.

There is increasing talk of needing to revisit the 2015 target of growing tourism to a £6bn a year industry, and perhaps the slowing of the economy will give all involved an excuse to do this without becoming red faced about it. The alignment of tourism with the six new Scottish Enterprise areas has had a major impact on Visit-

Scotland and the Enterprise agencies, with a significant shedding of jobs, and a redefinition of some roles. We are hoping for a leaner and fitter public sector, and happily tourism is one of the six industry groups that Enterprise is targeting. It is still a little early to assess the full impact on VisitScotland, but for now it is at least business as usual for QA and marketing. ASSC has been campaigning for increased promotion of the QA scheme, and early signs are that this will be taken on board.

The Scottish Government recognise the value and importance of tourism to Scotland, and this is reflected in a considerable public spend on our sector. Perhaps we have to whisper this quietly, but in England, VisitBritain has a similar budget to VisitScotland and even that is being cut. There is a parliamentary tourism inquiry going on at the Scottish Parliament just now, and I was asked to give evidence. Ross Anderson, green champion and on the ASSC Committee, and I spent an interesting morning being questioned by MSPs. I think they were listening!

VisitScotland.com re-launched in April with significant improvements. We welcome the increased marketing content, the fairer listing of businesses and the more visible contact details. There are still things to be tackled, like the presentation of self-catering pricing, and we will continue to work with VisitScotland.com on this. ASSC's contribution was publicly acknowledged at the official launch of the new site.

I am greatly encouraged by the take up so far by ASSC members of the Green Tourism Scheme. Green Tourism will not only save businesses money and be good for the environment, but will hopefully bring in more business through green marketing. Both ASSC's website and VisitScotland.com are now able to list GTBS members.

I hope that the season to date has been good for members. ASSC is 30 years old this year, and we will be marking this at a dinner after our Conference in November. I hope as many members as possible, and even some non-members will be able to join the celebrations.

David Smythe, Chairman



Attracting Visitors to Self-Catering in Scotland

www.embracescotland.co.uk

March 2008 was an extraordinary month. Not only did it see the Easter holidays separated from the Easter weekend itself, but it saw the launch of the ASSC's brand new website. Designed to stand out in the intensely competitive world of internet accommodation marketing, our *EmbraceScotland* website is aimed first and foremost at visitors to Scotland.

Why Embrace Scotland?

Why not – it's a lovely country! We wanted a website address that not only stood out from the crowd, but also one that invited an emotional connection and an active response from people trawling through endless collection of 'definitive' online holiday cottage directories. As you can imagine, there was much heated debate and exchange of opinion, and the consideration of many options, after which we eventually chose *EmbraceScotland*.

The Holy Search Engine Grail

Those in the business will be familiar with the almost daily emails promising to place your website 'top' of the search engine rankings. It's a dark and dubious art, and full of false promises (not to mention lies, damned lies and statistics!). However, we have worked closely with our website

designers, HotScot, and the online marketing experts Orbit Internet, to develop a site design and online marketing strategy which really will maximise that magical 'page rank'.

However, establishing a strong brand, a positive page rank, and top listings takes time, some money, and – crucially – partnership. We are investing more than we ever have before in online campaigns to raise our visibility and draw customers to the self-catering we offer. The key to success, however, will lie in members creating links from the hundreds of individual websites to *EmbraceScotland*.

Feature Highlights

In addition to our familiar and popular Late Availability and Seasonal Offers pages, the new website also introduces two new 'feature highlight' pages. These were launched focussing on properties which welcomed Pets, and those which held Green Tourism awards. In future, these special feature boxes will be changed regularly to showcase and promote all sorts of specialities – such as the remotest crofts, the most luxurious apartments, sea views, play facilities, and anything else visitors may want to know about!



Not Just Accommodation

Of course, *EmbraceScotland* will promote our members' many and various holiday properties right across Scotland. However, we also hope it will be of more general interest and use to anyone considering holidaying here. With features and events listings for every region, advice and guidance for visiting, travelling, choosing and staying, and ideas for what to do when you get there, it is so much more than just a property listing site!

Customer Feedback

Another innovation alongside the *EmbraceScotland* website is our new EnjoySelfcatering blog. Primarily a blog bringing snippets of news and ideas to anyone interested in self-catering, it will also be a direct way for visitors to give us feedback on everything from the design and use of the new website to issues of price, quality and facilities. Anyone can join in the blog, which can be found at www.enjoyselfcatering.co.uk.



Free Bottle of Wine? That will be £753 to you, Sir!

We thought that rather than cut our prices, we would add value to our offer in VisitScotland's *Keep Discovering* marketing campaign. Some nice wine and chocolates would do the trick, so we sourced good locally made sparkly wine from Cairn O Mohr at Errol, and some hand-made chocolates from Perth. Supporting local businesses is just the sort of thing we tourism businesses should be doing, and if it extended our season a bit, that was to be welcomed too.

This free bottle of wine now turns out to be a 'sale of alcohol'. Everywhere that sells alcohol now comes under the new licensing scheme. The scheme is extremely expensive to comply with, and requires architects' plans of buildings where alcohol is to be sold. It has produced some astonishing effects, and the regulations are being interpreted differently depending on your local Council.

If we are to continue to offer wine, we will have to attend a training course, get a personal licence, and possibly a premises licence as well. Perth and Kinross was quoted £577 (one off payment) plus £176 every year. Not to mention the cost of getting plans drawn up to an acceptable specification. It is an outrageous imposition by government for businesses who sell very little alcohol.

So, no more free wine from us. We simply cannot take the risk that our guests might walk half a mile into our local village and hang about causing bother and getting ASBOs after a couple of glasses of fizz. They will get local honey instead, which is probably OK until the food police turn up.

The new licensing regulations are a nonsense, and a disgraceful performance from a new government which was supposed to be lighter on business regulation than the last lot in charge!

Cloag Farm Cottages, Perthshire



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- ✓ Designed for self-caterers by self-caterers
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For features, benefits, online demos & prices visit
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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:

- Members sharing views on the intricacies and implications of their standard business **terms and conditions**.
- The ongoing challenges and benefits of engaging with **Visitscotland.com**, including what members make of the new 'agency' role.
- Clarification on how **HMO regulations** are being implemented and interpreted across the country.
- What we pay **cleaning staff** and how to get the best from them.
- Are electricity **coin meters** old fashioned?

Why don't you join in?

ASSC Green Scheme

At last year's ASSC AGM, we committed to an initiative which we believe could make us the first tourism membership Association in Scotland to have all its members with a 'Green' accreditation. ASSC will offer members a free visit by a trained Advisor, prior to the official inspection by GTBS, for those who have signed up to the GTBS scheme. These voluntary Advisors will provide guidance on how to achieve a positive inspection result. As an Association, we are committed to supporting sustainable tourism and this also supports VisitScotland's objective to make Scotland the most sustainable destination in Europe.

In April, Ross Anderson of East Lochhead Country Cottages, Frank and Jean Bowman of Foxglove Cottages, and Victoria Sutherland of Glencoe Cottages spent a day with the GTBS Team in Perth. These four GTBS Gold Award ASSC members are the vanguard of the Advisor team. They have volunteered their time to undertake the training and thereafter to visit and provide advice to members on request.

GTBS Training

Jon Proctor, the GTBS Technical Director, and his colleague Martin Webb gave the team a detailed insight into the scheme. They learned to distinguish between 'green wash' and a genuine commitment. They heard about the intricacies and

the interpretation of the assessment forms and procedures. They were introduced to the huge range of environmentally friendly products now on the market, and were given four pages of websites which could be helpful to applicants. Having all four worked for many years in self-catering, they are very aware of the various problems that might face an operator in implementing parts of the scheme. However, they were pleased to learn that the scheme is flexible enough to recognise the constraints that many operators face as a result of geographical location and availability of local facilities.

Marketing Benefits

We are confident that members will find a visit from one of the team a helpful experience. ASSC members should note that while the objectives of the GTBS are to reduce our carbon footprint and help save the planet for our children, there are distinct marketing benefits, particularly in today's climate, from membership of the GTBS.

One welcome new innovation they learnt about is that on applying for membership of the GTBS you are now entitled to display the GTBS logo in your marketing with the subheading 'Going Green'.

If you would like to find out more, or book an advisory visit, please contact Jenifer Moffat, ASSC Secretary, who will arrange this for you.



Award Winners!

Crubenbeg Highland Holiday Cottages are proud that they are the first self-catering cottages in Strathspey and Badenoch to receive a Gold Grading Award after assessment from the Green Business Tourism Scheme (GBTS). The Cottages are luxury 4 star self-catering cottages located at the Falls of Truim near Newtonmore in Cairngorm National Park. Their assessment included how they reduce their carbon footprint as a business, the recycling facilities for their guests, their business' commitment to local community environmental projects, managing their energy consumption, and encouraging local wildlife.



Gold is hard to achieve, and they aimed high because their company objective is to be in the top quartile of Cairngorms National Park businesses with regard to environmental performance, without affecting quality.

Owners Sian and Cameron's advice is that when going through the requirements of the GTBS, work through their document methodically, and have an action column on a spreadsheet to show how and when you actioned the item. Remember, to achieve accreditation you don't have to do everything, but you must show that you plan to do it all. Crubenbeg's environmental policy, plans and other information can be viewed on their website:

www.HighlandHolidayCottages.com

Partnership



the National Trust
for Scotland

a place for everyone

For many people, the chance to explore some of Scotland's heritage attractions is an essential part of their holiday here. Over 100 of these sites are in the care of the National Trust for Scotland, offering visitors a unique insight into the country's built, cultural and natural heritage. Many of their properties can be rented for self-catering holidays, and NTS is a member of the ASSC.

The diversity of the Trust's properties is amazing, including historic houses and castles, glorious gardens, unspoilt areas of countryside, nature reserves, iconic historic sites and fascinating examples of our industrial past. Newly opened this year is the impressive Visitor Centre at Culloden, which explains about the events leading up to, during and after the battle in 1746. The Centre has an interactive exhibition and a 360-degree 'immersive' film, and there are regular living history presentations on the battlefield itself, bringing this important period to life.

Elsewhere, other sites owned by the Trust are equally impressive, with examples such as Culzean Castle, Gladstone's Land, and Falkland Palace taking their place alongside Crarae and Inverewe Gardens, Torridon, Grey Mare's Tail and Ben Lawers to reflect the built and natural treasures of Scotland.

Offer to ASSC Members

The National Trust for Scotland and ASSC are keen to work more closely together in future through shared weblinks, improved communication to



Glencoe

members, and the provision of up-to-date Trust material to help your guests find their way around Scotland.

The Trust will send ASSC members copies of their main leaflet, illustrating and describing over 60 of its main sites, a copy of the most recent edition of their magazine *Scotland in Trust* and, as a 'thank you' for displaying these in your properties, they will also send 2 complimentary tickets so that you can visit one of their attractions for yourself.

Please contact Ian Gardner at the National Trust for Scotland by sending an email to igardner@nts.org.uk, letting him know that you are an ASSC member and telling him how many copies of the pack you would like.

The National Trust for Scotland is a charity and depends on the subscriptions of its members, income from visitors, donations and legacies to support its work. Your help, in providing information to guests and encouraging them to visit these fantastic sites, will help enormously and ensure that Scotland's heritage has an assured future.

ASSC Working With Scottish Tourism

ASSC Committee members (especially our Chairman, David Smythe) volunteer many days every year to ensure that the voice of self-catering is heard, listened to and understood, as we work in partnership to support and develop Scottish tourism.

In recent months, this has included meetings with:

- ◆ Scottish Parliament
- ◆ VisitScotland
- ◆ Scottish Enterprise
- ◆ Perthshire Tourism
- ◆ Scotland United
- ◆ VisitScotland.com
- ◆ Association of Scottish Visitor Attractions
- ◆ National Trust for Scotland
- ◆ Scottish Tourism Forum
- ◆ Fire Risk Assessment Training Team

Meet the Committee

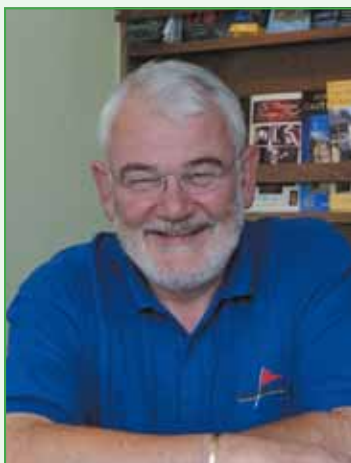
A regular spot to help you get to know the Members of the ASSC Committee. Here we introduce a new volunteers who was elected to the Committee at the 2007 Annual General Meeting.

Andrew Pirie

In a previous life, Andrew was a Chartered Surveyor. He worked in Fife and Edinburgh before returning to the Kingdom to start his own practice with offices in Cupar and Perth.

Growing increasingly disillusioned with the construction industry his thoughts turned more and more to tourism, particularly self-catering.

In 1999 he purchased a ruined farm steading outside St Andrews, built a new courtyard development of nine cottages and spent the next few years building up a



loyal client base and keeping the bank happy, not always an easy task!

Two years ago a new unit was added from a restored farm cottage on the site. The aim

of the business is always to give the clients a most comfortable and happy experience with great personal care and attention. Balmashie is very children-friendly and Andrew has now watched families grow up from year to year where the guests have become friends as well as clients.

Andrew is married with two grown up sons who have flown the nest. In the little time available away from work Andrew is studying for a general MA part time at St Andrews University and is a great follower of sport, particularly football, rugby and cricket.

FoNSCA

The Federation of National Self-Catering Associations works for self-catering across the UK. ASSC is a founding member and it is currently chaired by our Chairman, David Smythe.

When visiting other parts of the UK, don't forget our colleagues in FoNSCA:

England - EASCO

www.englishselfcatering.co.uk

Wales - WASCO

www.wasco.org.uk

Northern Ireland - NISCHA

www.nischa.com

Current Issues for ASSC

A selection of items from current ASSC business

Season To Date — Variable reports of a slow start and depressed bookings in some areas will be monitored as the season develops. All members will shortly be encouraged to submit feedback to the ASSC on their experience of the season to date.

Fire Risk Assessments — ASSC has been working with the government fire regulation department over the Fire Risk Assessment requirement that is now mandatory for self-catering accommodation. We helped to secure free-to-attend workshops right across Scotland as well as enhanced information on the www.firelaw.org website.

Impact of Fuel Costs — We were in early touch with the Minister, Jim Mather, ahead of the Grangemouth dispute. Self-caterers are more vulnerable to fuel supply problems as they are more rural and usually their visitors need cars. Also, many properties run on heating oil, as mains gas is not an option, and heating oil prices have risen more than other comparable costs.

New Members

The ASSC continues to attract self-catering operators from across Scotland and takes this opportunity to extend a warm welcome to the following new members who have joined us in recent months:

Chris Ballance	Moffat
Kirsteen Barr-Kearsley	Stirling
Charlotte Bell	Castle Douglas
Liz & Ernie Bentley	Peebles, property in Edinburgh
Michele Birnie	Tomintoul
Alan Bruce	Bridge of Alvah
Angus Bruce	Ullapool
Elsbeth Buchanan	Inchyra
John & Linda Capper	Cambridgeshire, property in Dunoon
Ellen Cattanach	Tyndrum
Richard Cooke	Brechin, property in Onich
Mr & Mrs J Coulson	Stranraer
Diana Dalrymple	Edzel
Stephen Dalton	Perth
John & Elaine Davidson	Comrie
Bill & Pat Drysdale	Thornhill
Emma Edmondson	Coldingham
Ann Flett	Caithness
Sandra Fry	Jedburgh
Emma & Alan Gardiner	Biggar
Diane Gilmore	Stranraer
Andrew Gray	Carnoustie
Stuart Hardie	London, property in Strathtay
Charles Henderson	Pitlochry
Carol Houghton	Lauder
Archie Hunter	Rosewell
Chris & Carol Keelan	Dalavich
Jennifer Kennedy	Ardentiny
Doug Kerr	Glasgow, property in Girvan
Lyn Lawrie	Fort William
Christine Leith	Edinburgh
D.R. MacLean	Inverness
Iseabail MacTaggart	Bowmore Distillery, Isle of Islay
John Mann	Onich
James McClymont	Crummore
Amanda McConnell et al	Kilmarnock
Brenda McDonald	Aberdeen
Paul McFatridge	Kentallen
Andy & Aneela McKenna	Innerleithen
Mr & Mrs Nimmo	Cardross, property in Glasgow
Jan Ord	Ballater
John & Liz Perkins	Beauly
Wendy Petchey & Ray Sweet	Devon, property in Caithness
Alexandra Reid	Cannich
Ken Ritchie	Rugby, property in St.Andrews
Barbara Sayers	Angus
Mr & Mrs M Veitch	Ayr

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