

## Destination Leaders Programme Case Studies



### Destination Leaders Programme Learning from Amsterdam



## DLP Case Study 10: Destination Learning from Amsterdam

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## Introduction and Background

The Destination Leaders Programme, developed by Scottish Enterprise, is a first in Europe, and at the time of writing, over 60 tourism professionals have graduated with an Executive Certificate in Leadership awarded by Edinburgh Napier University. Through its combination of speakers, workshops, participant engagement and opportunities to learn and gain insights from other destinations, the programme seeks to unlock growth potential at a business and destination level through the '*aggregation of marginal gains*'. As well as four one-day workshops covering destination development, the customer journey, sustainability and influencing government policy agendas and the digital economy, there are three residential weekends in different locations, plus an assessed leadership group project.

This case study highlights the aims, objectives and benefits of the residential learning journey, an important part of the Destination Leaders Programme. We hear from both programme leaders and DLP alumni on their experience of destination learning.

## Behind the Scenes: Gaining Insights from other Destinations

Some of the most stimulating content in the Destination Leaders Programme is found on the residential weekends, which have included visits to Manchester, Amsterdam and Copenhagen, with a valuable "insider view" perspective offered by key tourism stakeholders and speakers; plus a real opportunity for participants to see "behind the scenes" into the workings of another destination. Learning from other destinations is a chance for DLP participants to consolidate much of what they have absorbed from speakers and workshops during their time on the leadership programme; and with the last residential weekend towards the end of the course, it's traditionally a time when much of the "destination learning" is consolidated; as participants experience it for themselves, in practice and in context.

**Susan Russell, Marketing Manager of Festivals Edinburgh recalls:** *"The Amsterdam learning journey was where a lot of what I'd learned was consolidated and things fell into place. I found there was quite a lot to compare between Edinburgh and Amsterdam. From a destination perspective, having absorbed a lot of academic learning on the DLP programme by that point, it really brought everything together for me. It was interesting to learn that as a destination, Amsterdam is not selling the city centre and all the elements you'd first think would be your best sellers. Instead what it is doing is taking people outside the city, to the suburbs and encouraging visitors to flow to other equally interesting areas. Amsterdam is finding that the city centre level has become really big, which also has an impact on its residents, and they have to be taken into account too".*

As well as gaining valuable insights into how other destinations face similar challenges and opportunities and the chance to make some lasting professional connections; this destination learning experience allows attendees to identify what they can take back and apply on several levels; to their own working practices, businesses and organisations and teams and at a destination level. The opportunity to share best practice, ideas and to discuss challenges with other tourism leaders is incredibly powerful. However it's not always a perfect picture, and host destinations have been honest about the complexities and challenges involved in destination leadership.

**Anna Young of Visit West Lothian says:** *“Some of the destinations like Manchester and Amsterdam particularly, were so inspiring and very open about some of the challenges that they'd had, they certainly weren't portraying it in that everything had been perfect or smooth sailing for them, which was refreshing”.*

## **Destination Leadership: The Bigger Picture**

The learning journey is designed to create an appreciation and understanding of the value of effective leadership at an individual, business and destination level for DLP participants. **Kenneth Wardrop, Programme Leader, Edinburgh Napier University says:**

*“The learning journey helps programme participants to understand the power of destination leadership to achieve a shift change in market positioning, competitive advantage and growth in the visitor economy through collaboration and innovation”.*

## **Developing 'Destination Thinking'**

One of the most significant aspects of the learning journey is when programme participants are able to identify the value of effective leadership at an individual, business and destination level and which aspects of transferable best practice can be shared from other destinations, and applied to their own respective experiences.

**Nancy Riach, Partnerships and Development Manager at The Royal Edinburgh Military Tattoo:** *“One of the key speaker moments for me was when Chris Buckingham spoke to us at our residential weekend in St. Andrews. Chris was originally involved in the setting up of the very first Destination Leaders programme for Melbourne, Australia, talking about how it was set up and how Melbourne works as an events capital of the world - and how this was a strategic decision for the destination to make it an accessible place. At this point the Tattoo was looking at its offshore programme, including travelling to Australia, and we were considering some different destinations there. Listening to Chris Buckingham allowed me to pick up some contacts and understand how Melbourne operated as a destination, inspiring me to research and develop Melbourne as one of the Australian destinations the Tattoo looked at”.*

## Learning from Amsterdam: A Case Study in Collaboration

Amsterdam Marketing defines itself as *“the city marketing organization of the Amsterdam Metropolitan Area, active in the fields of promotion, information, research and services. Our key ambition is to put this region on the map as one of the five most attractive metropolitan areas in Europe for its residents, visitors, businesses and influential groups. Under the motto 'I Amsterdam', we present the region as a dynamic place to live and work, an attractive travel destination and a test market for innovation”*.

In March 2015, DLP Year 2 participants travelled to Amsterdam for their final learning journey, the visit offering an exceptional opportunity to see outside their own respective destinations and to allow them to reflect back on the operations and competitive positioning of their own destinations: Edinburgh, Argyll and the Isles and Scotland.

According to Amsterdam Marketing, *“Connection and cooperation is what makes Amsterdam Marketing strong and functional as a city marketing organisation. As the central organization we connect cross-sector parties. More than ever, this comes down to this key principle: “together we are stronger”*.

Over forty eight hours, this key principle was reinforced by several senior tourism operators in Amsterdam, including Amsterdam Marketing, the Van Gogh Museum and music and conference centre iJvvenues; who shared insights with DLP participants on how they had successfully grown their business through collaboration. The DLP group learned that its Dutch colleagues were managing peaks in demand from visitors in Amsterdam city centre with smart visitor dispersal plans. The group was also keen to hear how Amsterdam Marketing had helped simplify its structure in order to manage a complex range of partners delivering tourism.

DLP attendees were welcomed by the team at Amsterdam Marketing and enjoyed a presentation from Director of Marketing, Geerte Udo, with valuable insights into the success of the **'I Amsterdam'** brand and global place marketing, the importance of aligning destination messaging, the power of a shared and clear vision for the destination, strong leadership provided by Amsterdam Marketing, and the benefits of collaboration. Attendees from Edinburgh were pleased to learn that the Edinburgh Tourism Action Group (ETAG) model for destination collaboration was identified as best practice and something which Amsterdam was also learning from.

## Learning from Amsterdam: A Case Study in Collaboration - continued

Museums play a significant role in Amsterdam's appeal. Around 80% of tourists visit a museum during their stay, and the city's cultural offerings top the rankings for both domestic and international visitors. The team at the Van Gogh Museum shared insights into how they had developed the museum into a culturally diverse venue via events and hospitality; and the impressive growth of visitor numbers and diverse audiences as a result. DLP attendees experienced this for themselves in an impressive Friday night "museum late" at the venue, an example for venues across the world.

**Diane McRae, Senior Event Manager at the Royal Yacht Britannia, Edinburgh, and a DLP 2014/15 participant said:** *"For me a key learning point from Amsterdam is that collaboration in the city comes across strongly from the top down and the ground level up, with the destination taking the experience from this collective approach and positively moving it forward, this is something our destination can learn from."*

One of the most memorable Amsterdam visits was hosted by ijVenues, the city's first 'joined up' Music and Conference Centre. DLP attendees learned that this impressive, innovative working partnership of organisations can host 1,900 conference delegates just five minutes from the centre of the city and that the partners, 5 star Movenpick hotels, Passenger Terminal Amsterdam, and the state owned Bimhuis (one of the world's Top 10 live music and jazz venues) have significantly increased revenues and sales by delivering an integrated product. The hotel reported 89% occupancy, much of this from new business tourism guests, and according to GM Albert Rouwendal, Movenpick plans to embed this collaborative model across their brand worldwide.

Some key take-aways from Amsterdam which could be applied by Destination Leaders to help grow tourism in Scotland included the following insights:

- Industry partners work together and share intelligence for the economic benefit of area, city and country to ensure a superb customer journey from start to finish
- Help residents be advocates and ambassadors – "Love your city."
- The most powerful collaborations are built on a clear business rationale (but a social element often helps open doors too – have a beer together!).
- Businesses and destinations should capitalise on their icons – particularly in far-away markets.
- Manage partners' expectations – not every partner should be equal – it's ok to say no.

## Collaboration for Strategic Economic Growth

Annabel Meikle of The Whisky Belle Consultancy was impressed by the openness of the Dutch people. She observes, *“I was struck by the openness that they have working together in collaboration with other businesses and not seeing that as a threat. I was struck by the leadership and the trust: that the ability to trust allowed the partners to develop their businesses and so the experience that they could offer visitors was much bigger and much more valuable and enjoyable as a result.”*

Cathy Craig, Commercial Director of Abellio Scotrail, was impressed by the strategic thinking of the partnership working involved in music and conference centre, ijvenues. Cathy says: *I enjoyed the visit to ijvenues: it’s the idea of thinking longer-term and ahead not just build a building for a specific purpose, but thinking about linking things together, about the future, doing the planning now. The whole idea of bringing businesses to work collaboratively to attract additional visitors has just been fantastic”*.

## Conclusion

Kenneth Wardrop concludes, *“The Destination Leaders Programme learning journey helps consolidate participants’ thinking on the importance of leadership at a destination level and consider the power of leadership to raise aspirations and achieve a shift change in the quality and nature of the visitor experience (through the end to end customer journey), and the competitive market positioning of the destination as a place in which to invest, live, work, study and visit”*.

Gordon Hodge, Head of Conferencing and Events at the University of Strathclyde agrees, *“We heard from some inspiring speakers on the programme and on our learning journey to Copenhagen - it’s a privilege to be able to experience this. The programme allowed me to see how my part of the organisation can have an impact on the economic development of the city which I think is really valuable.”*

## Further Links:

Scottish Enterprise: [www.scottish-enterprise.com](http://www.scottish-enterprise.com)

DLP Case Study Videos: <http://bit.ly/1okkX9Q>

Marketing Amsterdam: [www.iamsterdam.com/en/amsterdam-marketing](http://www.iamsterdam.com/en/amsterdam-marketing)

Van Gogh Museum: [www.vangoghmuseum.nl/en](http://www.vangoghmuseum.nl/en)

ijVenues: <https://ijvenues.com/>

