

Destination Leaders Programme Case Studies



women in tourism
www.womenintourism.co.uk

2016

Women in Tourism Initiative

Destination Leaders:

Susan Russell
Festivals Edinburgh



DLP Case Study: Susan Russell, Festivals Edinburgh: Women in Tourism

DLP Case Study: Susan Russell, Marketing Manager, Festivals Edinburgh Women in Tourism

The Student

Susan Russell is Marketing Manager for Festivals Edinburgh where she has been working since 2008, her role evolving year on year. Blogmanay has been a key component which has been experimental in its marketing. Before joining Festivals Edinburgh, Susan spent six years working at national tourism agency VisitScotland where she had four different roles. The first was as an administrator in Inverness - Susan's home town - then she moved into the International Team to work in North American travel trade, progressing to the UK Consumer Marketing Team, and then in the North America/Australasia PR team.

The Organisation

Festivals Edinburgh was created in 2007 by the Directors of the city's twelve major festivals who came together to work across a series of priority areas where they recognised strength in collaboration. The marketing team accounts for fifty percent of the organisation, and Susan manages a team of two, which grows to a team of five in the summer months. The team focus on integrated consumer marketing campaigns in key English cities, and overseas markets such as Germany and France which have knowledge of our festivals, targeting places with direct access routes into Edinburgh.

Susan's Story

In this case study, Susan Russell talks about her experience of being part of the second cohort of the Napier Destination Leaders Programme which had participants from destinations Edinburgh and Argyll. Susan discusses how her experience of the programme has influenced her industry engagement, her own leadership skills and has led to her forming the new industry group Women in Tourism.

What was your key motivation for participating in the DLP?

The DLP seemed ideal because of the aspect of the academic side of looking at the destination development element and leadership in practice. That appealed to me because I had been away from academia and I was keen to look at models of best practice, the best ways of working. My leadership skills had evolved organically over twelve years of working, so work-based learning appealed, plus the opportunity to look at projects which had a return and real results: that was really important to me.

What were your expectations prior to starting the programme?

On our course (DLP Year 2: Edinburgh & Argyll) we didn't really know one another, I only knew two people, so the opportunity to engage with people I wouldn't know in my day to day job was really attractive in terms of learning and what I could gain from others. In addition, taking part in the programme was appealing because of what I could share and exchange with others from my own experience, skills and knowledge. Historically I've worked more with public sector organisations so I was also keen to gain an insight into commercial operations.

How has the DLP impacted on you professionally and personally?

I think the experience of being with people from different sectors who use different approaches has helped me in terms of confidence with my own approach. In the public sector there are often constraints, so by coming into contact with people from the private sector I had the opportunity to question things and change things. I feel this gave me more power, more personal power, and the ability to influence.

I think that this has continued since graduating from the DLP, and that it's evident in all the projects that I've become involved in since taking part. The China Ready Project is one example. I've become heavily involved; I'm in touch with the Chair and representatives from the Edinburgh Tourism Action Group (ETAG) on almost a daily basis. It seems that I've become a conduit of sorts, for information on China for the sector now, which is great.

My role within the industry has definitely flourished since taking part in the DLP. Talking to people on the programme, I came into contact with Tourism Society Scotland. I applied to become one of their Committee Members and have been able to make valuable contributions to the industry as a committee member (and now Treasurer). I applied for a Hospitality Industry Trust (HIT) Scholarship to extend my professional development and I was successful, so that's given me some extra funding to go over to Australia and New Zealand later in the year to learn from those destinations. The one project which has probably had the greatest impact and influence for me has been the emergence and evolution of "Women in Tourism" for which I was nominated, and won a UK Rising Star Award for, from *We Are The City*.

Women in Tourism: Background and Context

Women in Tourism (WIT) www.womenintourism.co.uk was formed in June 2015 by a small group of DLP alumna, in recognition of the challenges and opportunities for women within the sector. The current committee of nine, chaired by Susan Russell of Festivals Edinburgh, represents a wide cross-section of industry including accommodation, festivals and events, and attractions. WIT aims to inspire, motivate, encourage and support women across the sector; while advocating for greater gender balance across leadership roles within industry. The group continues to develop.

How did “Women in Tourism” evolve into an industry group?

The DLP was fundamental in the early thinking around Women in Tourism. A substantial element of the early development came from listening to speakers and workshop discussions, while despite offering fantastic senior engagement from industry leaders, the majority of those speaking were male colleagues. It made me and my DLP colleagues consider reasons for the lack of female industry speakers, when sixty percent of those employed across tourism-related businesses are women. At the Scottish Tourism Alliance Annual Conference (part of Scottish Tourism Week, Spring 2015, Glasgow) my colleagues and I observed that eleven out of thirteen keynote speakers and panellists were men. This prompted further conversations around the need for women in tourism to have more of a “voice”, so in June 2015 a small group of DLP 1 and 2 female students plus a couple of programme tutors met up informally.

We focused on identifying the challenges and opportunities for women in the tourism sector: we didn’t want to create a new group just for the sake of it. What emerged was what we called “the encyclopaedic knowledge and skills” of women across the sector. That is, women wanted to reach positions of leadership but didn’t necessarily know how to do that. We felt that there *was* a glass ceiling within our industry once women reach a particular level together with issues, including board-level engagement, and being unsure of how to progress through a lack of guidance across the sector. Timing for developing WIT as an industry group seemed right, due to the national tourism agency VisitScotland focusing on ensuring a 50:50 male-female split of board representation by 2020; and moves to encourage women to attend workshops relating to this. This policy goes right to central Government as it was the First Minister who had made that pledge. It is as much about motivating and empowering women and supporting them as it is about board level engagement. By December 2015, we had plans to obtain industry data via a research survey, create a website, blog, Twitter account and host an industry event with Tourism Society Scotland – once things started moving, they moved quickly!

How has “Women in Tourism” developed to date?

Women in Tourism launched officially in February 2016, with our website www.womenintourism.co.uk and an industry survey to obtain current data from both men and women in the sector. We were lucky to receive press coverage for both the launch of our survey and our event. We were assisted by previous and current DLP students to hold our event which took place on 17 March 2016 as part of Scottish Tourism Week: Helen Adams, the Chair of Tourism Society Scotland, and Amanda Wrathall, Sales and Marketing Director, of Edinburgh International Conference Centre. We were delighted to receive around 70 attendees for the event and we secured an impressive panel of female speakers, chaired by Catherine Holden, Director of External Relations at National Museums Scotland: Amanda Wrathall, Director of Sales & Marketing at Edinburgh International Conference Centre; Melissa Singh, Marketing Assistant at VisitScotland; Rebecca Brooks, Managing Director of Abbey Tours, and Juliana Delaney, Chief Executive of Continuum Attractions.

The support we had from the industry was really encouraging, with attendees present from VisitScotland, the Scottish Government, agencies including People 1st and Skills Development Scotland, and a male and female audience from a range of sectors including hotels and hospitality, destination organisations, tour guides, and activity tourism.

What are the next steps for “Women in Tourism”?

Things have moved really fast, but at the moment keeping WIT going is very much down to the goodwill, time and resource of a very small group of nine passionate women! Two key areas which emerged from the event discussion and the survey results were:

- 1. Mentoring:** Our survey reported that 28% of women had had the opportunity to be mentored in the past and 76% said they'd welcome the opportunity to be mentored. There is a sector-specific mentoring opportunity here, not just for women.
- 2. Flexible Working:** Some key issues beyond the sector relate to part-time working, family impact on work roles, part-time working, job-sharing issues, for example. This was a recurring theme in the event discussion particularly from women who work in hospitality and hotels because of what can be long, unsociable hours. This also highlighted the need for fresh questions around these industry issues: it doesn't mean that we can't try and change them. These are some of the issues which may need more discussion.

We are also mindful that our group currently only has representation in the central belt, and that the challenges of the sector are clearly different in other areas such as the Highlands, where I'm from originally.

Tourism outside of major cities; rural tourism and micro-businesses clearly present different challenges: there might not be anywhere for employees to go in terms of developing a role. Perhaps people don't necessarily have the hierarchy even though they have the skills, the

attitude, the right approach for the destination; so a mentoring scheme might be valuable in this context, helping people identify those skills and leadership; and to assist them to gain value without leaving a job they're passionate about. Working towards WIT representation in other parts of Scotland is on our agenda.

The next step for WIT is that our committee will meet for a formal half-day workshop in summer 2016, to really identify how we *can* make an impact going forward and what is valuable for the industry. We try to keep our audience updated via the website, blog and social media although this can sometimes be challenging as we are all volunteers. We currently (June 2016) have over 700 Twitter followers and over 200 members in our LinkedIn group, so I would say, watch this space.

Which part of the DLP has had the strongest impact on you?

The last residential weekend of DLP, the Amsterdam learning journey, was where a lot of what I'd learned was really consolidated and things fell into place. Although I did leave my day job at the door, 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. I think Edinburgh at that time (March 2015) was still very much finding its feet and the *This is Edinburgh* marketing campaign hadn't been running for very long. The Amsterdam campaign, "IAmsterdam" was maturing and we learned that the city was forced to re-evaluate what it did next.

For me it was very 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. On a capacity level, 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.

What advice would you give to anyone considering doing the Destination Leaders Programme?

I would say, leave your day job at the door. Go into it with your eyes open. When I started, I wanted to go in with an open mind and learn from others, to consider new ways of working, and not relate everything back to my current role and the impact it could have on the festivals. Obviously there was plenty to learn related to that, but I wanted to keep an open mind set. Although it's an academic course, if you've never been to University, don't let that put you off. Half of my group hadn't been to University and I think they gained as much from the course as I did.

Conclusion

There's a really good balance of theoretical learning but the DLP always brings it back to a real-life situation and context: you never really feel like it is not relevant, so there's huge value to it. Our project group: me, Diane McCrae of Royal Yacht Britannia, Marion McKean, formerly of Premier Inn and Lindsay Wilkie of Edinburgh First, came out of the course with a distinction, which was amazing – a valuable qualification to have for your CV. Would I have done all of these things if I hadn't taken part in DLP? It's probably around fifty-fifty, partially about confidence and ambition, but also it's about the powerful network the Destination Leaders Programme offers you, and the confidence you gain from taking part. I believe that the value you get from the Destination Leaders Programme is greater if you just go into it with an open mind and wait and see what will happen.

Further Links:

Festivals Edinburgh: www.edinburghfestivalcity.com/about

Women in Tourism www.womenintourism.co.uk

Women in Tourism Research Results: <http://www.womenintourism.co.uk/passion-for-industry-drives-women-in-tourism/>

Scottish Enterprise: www.scottish-enterprise.com

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

