

Destination Leaders Programme Case Studies



Destination Leaders:
Marion McKean
Premier Inn
&
Diane McCrae
The Royal Yacht
Britannia



Making Edinburgh 'China Ready'

The image shows two women, Marion McKean and Diane McCrae, smiling in a bar setting. The background features a wooden bar with shelves of bottles and a framed picture on the wall. The text on the right side of the image lists their names and affiliations. The bottom of the image contains the title "Making Edinburgh 'China Ready'" and two logos: the Scottish Enterprise logo and the dlp (destination leaders programme) logo.

DLP Case Study: Making Edinburgh 'China Ready'

DLP Case Study: Making Edinburgh ‘China Ready’: Marion McKean, Cluster Manager Premier Inn Edinburgh City & Diane McRae, Senior Sales & Events Manager, Royal Yacht Britannia

Background: From Student Project to Destination Initiative

This case study charts the progress of what began as a group project assignment by four participants on the second Destination Leaders Programme (2014-2015) – Marion McKean, formerly of Whitbread Premier Inns, Diane McRae of Royal Yacht Britannia, Susan Russell of Festivals Edinburgh and Lyndsay Wilkie of Edinburgh First- and its transformation to the China Ready plan; an industry initiative for Edinburgh. At the time of writing, the **China Ready** Plan currently includes an industry group, a published Business Opportunities Guide, a series of industry business briefings including a digital media workshop, available to the Edinburgh tourism sector via ETAG (Edinburgh Tourism Action Group).

For their project, the group chose to ask the question, *“Is Edinburgh ready to capitalise on the Chinese Market?”* and used their research findings to identify practical industry recommendations on how the city could become China-ready. Since presenting their findings and recommendations to industry in May 2015, the four DLP alumni Marion McKean, Diane McRae, Susan Russell and Lyndsay Wilkie have watched their DLP group project transform into a tangible industry initiative with support from ETAG, Scottish Enterprise, Edinburgh Napier University, Edinburgh Airport and China Air Services.

Making Edinburgh China Ready – What Does that Mean?

Worth £62 million in 2014, China is in the top 5 growth markets for Scotland. Edinburgh is the most visited UK destination for Chinese visitors outside London, and has approximately 3,400 Chinese students studying in the city - in 2014 over 100,000 Chinese tourists visited Edinburgh Castle alone. To capitalise on the market growth potential, Edinburgh wants to increase the volume and value of Chinese visitors and is keen to attract Scotland’s first direct flight from China. The China-Ready plan for the city involves:

- Industry Familiarisation: training opportunities, business briefings, print resources such as the China Ready Business Opportunities Guide
- Industry Collaboration: making the most of opportunities such as media visits, #blogmanay, linking with Chinese Students and celebrating Chinese New Year
- Industry Support for the Edinburgh China Air Link Project

The Destination Leaders Programme Group Project

The DLP group project is the assessed component of the programme and is designed to give participants the opportunity to demonstrate and apply the insights and learnings gained from the speakers, workshops, research and the other DLP participants over the course of the programme. It also provides participants with a valuable and realistic real-time experience of the challenges in developing destination level projects, from considering the strategic business and market drivers which are affecting destinations globally in their approach to destination development to the practical issues of working collaboratively with a range of colleagues across different subsectors of the tourism industry.

While not the key driver, there are already a number of examples of group projects translating into a tangible piece of product development, enhancement of the customer or visitor experience, or prompting further tourism industry research; these offer valuable additional benefits for destination development and DLP participants.

Margaret McNeil, Tourism Manager, Edinburgh Tourism Action Group (ETAG) says:
“The Edinburgh 2020 Tourism Strategy had identified the China market as having significant potential for economic growth, but this project was the catalyst to really focusing on the opportunity and identifying practical activities, supported by effective destination leadership and collaborative working, to ensure the city was genuinely making the most of this opportunity. The timing was also very important, given Edinburgh Airport’s focus on developing a China air route into the city.”

China Ready: Marion McKean, Diane McRae, Susan Russell, Lyndsay Wilkie

In this case study, Marion McKean and Diane McRae explain the motivations for the group’s choice of project study, insights into how they approached the project work and what their research involved, the challenges they have faced along the way, what impact they hope the China Ready Plan can have for Edinburgh as a destination and the benefits of being part of the Destination Leaders Programme.

What was your motivation for choosing China as a research topic?

Marion explains, “We were aware of the importance of China as an emerging growth market for Edinburgh and there were signs that the city had already recognised the opportunity – through conversations during the programme with other DLP participants such as Edinburgh Airport, and via insights into other destinations that we learned about on the programme such as Melbourne, we knew that China was a high spend market and that collaboration with China had delivered growth into other destinations such as

Australia, USA and the EU. I think all in our project group were conscious that Edinburgh as a city talked about 'China' but didn't know how to fully engage with Chinese visitors". Diane continues, "The timing for researching China was also significant – 2015 was the Year of UK-China Cultural Exchange, there was already a £14bn trade agreement between the UK and China (in 2014), a signing of a Memorandum of Understanding and we were aware of Edinburgh Airport's ambitions to be the first airport to attract Scotland's first direct flight from China."

What approach did the group take to working together on the project?

We took a practical approach, given that there were four of us and we had a limited time frame to complete our research then deliver a final report and a presentation. It was really important for each of us in the group to have an individual focus and from the start we all agreed that there would be no divas! We ensured that each group member took ownership of a specific area of study or research – it made sense to play to the strengths of team members.

Working on the group project can be tough in terms of getting time to meet up and progress the work, so in terms of communication, we looked for ways to share updates and information via channels which worked for us, for example, using What's App instant messaging.

When it came to compiling the final report we each contributed written sections but trusted just one editor. The most important factor for us was mutual respect, both professionally and personally and fortunately, this worked very well for us as a group.

What did your group project research consist of?

We conducted desk research via journals and digital resources from Edinburgh Napier University digital library, which we got guidance and help into using at the start of the programme. Using information from other destinations we had studied on the Destination Leaders programme we were able to compile city competitor analysis for Melbourne, New York, Paris and London.

We wanted to find out more about the Chinese student population in Edinburgh, so we organised focus groups and questionnaires – we had immediate access for the questionnaire at Edinburgh Napier University and we ran focus groups at Edinburgh University through Lindsay's network.

We acquired valuable data online from tourism bodies including VisitScotland and Visit Britain. We drafted a questionnaire to survey Edinburgh-based tourism businesses and marketing bodies and organised meetings with tour operators, hoteliers, visitor attractions and retailers who recognise or already work with China including Harvey

Nichols, Edinburgh Castle, JAC Scotland and Wangping Travel. Lastly, we identified the important role of digital media channels (significantly different for China) in messaging.

What leadership challenges did you face in working on the project?

Like all of our DLP colleagues, there were several. Despite a harmonious group dynamic, time management was one of the most challenging factors, trying to make time for DLP project workshops, residential weekends and study visits, reading, personal study, and our own full time job and personal commitments required a lot of juggling and collaboration, as well as managing the programme timing across holidays and leave periods.

Half of our group had no academic experience and the project report required academic referencing and editing, not to mention strict word counts. Whilst researching, we frequently encountered contradictory information across tourism statistics. Managing all of this was great experience in terms of our leadership skills, requiring collaboration, listening, patience and again, mutual respect.

What has the *China Ready* initiative achieved for Edinburgh as a destination and what are the challenges ahead?

In terms of progress so far for Edinburgh as a destination, at the time of writing (February 2016) this includes the set-up of a collaborative industry group chaired by DLP alumnus Rob Lang, Head of Marketing at Edinburgh Airport. The group is ETAG-led with a consultant to drive strategy and the group agrees to:

- Contribute to and benefit from Edinburgh's developing position as a China-Ready destination
- Build on recommendations from 2020 Strategy; DLP findings and 2015 ETAG conference to collaborate
- To support and develop businesses individual and collective understanding and ambitions to:
 - Increase the volume of Chinese visitors
 - Support Edinburgh Airport's drive to convert a China direct route

We have engaged with several bodies which have helped us progress, including the China Britain Business Council, the Chinese Consulate, City of Edinburgh Council and VisitBritain. April Tsai, Programme Coordinator of English as a Foreign Language at the Edinburgh Institute, part of Edinburgh Napier University, has also provided invaluable tips and first hand experiences of how to welcome and support Chinese visitors to Edinburgh and Scotland – both in our business opportunities guide and at the ETAG 2016 conference.

What has the *China Ready* initiative achieved for Edinburgh as a destination and what are the challenges ahead - continued

ETAG has hosted a number of briefings and workshops for the Edinburgh tourism sector since 2015 comprising a Breakfast briefing to launch the initiative, a Digital Workshop, an Innovation Workshop, and a successful China presentation at the 2016 ETAG Conference (February). The role of digital media and #Blogmanay for Edinburgh's Hogmanay celebrations 2015-2016 has been significant in attracting Chinese digital media as a gateway to both Edinburgh and to Scotland. So far, there have been 20m views of content created through the two hashtags/topics (#hogmanay and #blogmanay) on Weibo.

In terms of current and future challenges, our project research highlighted potential barriers to growth including the Schengen Visa, (at the time of writing the UK Government extended the Visa to 2 years in January 2016, which would potentially enable visitors from China to make multiple trips to the UK for longer periods. The visa would be available for business people to attend conferences or to investigate setting up a business, and tourists) the lack of direct flight access to Edinburgh/Scotland, and the absence of language and signage for visitors.

By creating a dedicated strategy for the city to engage with the Chinese market, an active industry group including our airport, and by briefing our businesses how to engage with Chinese visitors and how to communicate via the appropriate digital channels, we believe that becoming "China Ready" will go a long way to prepare Edinburgh to welcome Chinese visitors when the moment arrives.

What impact has the learning experience of your group project activity had on you personally and/or professionally?

Diane says, "We were very lucky in that all the members of our project group got on instantly and the chemistry made our experience a memorable one, we're all in touch regularly. The programme is one of the best things I've ever done to date – for example, our weekend learning journey to Amsterdam was such a valuable experience and we took back lots we could apply in Edinburgh.

From the venues collaborating there, you can tell that right across the city that their one aim when a visitor comes in is to make sure that the visitor experience is consistent across the whole journey and the venues, festivals, events, accommodation and attractions do that by working together".

What impact has the learning experience of your group project activity had on you personally and/or professionally – continued

Marion adds: “It’s been a fantastic programme with key learnings on collaboration and real joined up thinking, with so much that we can take from other destinations including Amsterdam, Melbourne and Vienna, and apply to Edinburgh. As a result of doing the Destination Leaders Programme, several DLP alumni from Years 1, 2 and 3 are now participating together in other newly formed industry projects, some of which Diane and I are both involved in. I’ve also embarked on a mentoring project for young people in schools, probably because of the exposure to leadership skills and learning I gained from the DLP experience and the desire to give something back, and get a sense of the personal impact I can have on the tourism industry by contributing.”

Conclusion

Diane concludes: “Marion, Susan, Lyndsay and I have benefited hugely from having participated in the Destination Leaders programme. Our entire DLP Year 2 group has formed a lasting network and each cohort year, the DLP network gets bigger and more powerful.

The Making Edinburgh China Ready initiative evolving from our group project is just one example of the positive outcomes and creative leadership thinking coming from those inspired by their time on the Destination Leaders Programme; creating real impact on our respective destinations and our own personal development. We can’t recommend it highly enough.”

Further Links:

ETAG: www.etag.org.uk/2015/10/etag-launches-china-ready-initiative

ETAG: www.etag.org.uk/2015/12/blogmanay-welcomes-china

ETAG: www.etag.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/ETAG-China-Ready-Business-Opportunity-Guide.pdf

ETAG: www.etag.org.uk/market-info/china-ready

Scottish Enterprise: www.scottish-enterprise.com

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

