



Destination Leaders Programme Case Studies



DLP Case Study: Haggis Adventures

DLP Case Study: Haggis Adventures: Pete Duncan

The Student

Pete Duncan is Operations Manager (Business Operations) for Haggis Adventures. Based in Edinburgh and having worked for Haggis Adventures since 1998, Pete is responsible for all aspects of the visitor experience from operations of the retail outlet on the Royal Mile to service delivery on the tour coaches. Pete is also responsible for the Haggis Adventures accommodation unit at Fort Augustus in the Scottish Highlands which he usually visits three to four times a year. Pete looks after a team of five managers who in turn have their own teams – the five managers are responsible for a team of fifty staff. The organisation recently moved into new offices in Edinburgh’s West End.

The Organisation

Haggis Adventures is Scotland's longest running and most popular tour operator for young independent travellers. With an emphasis of fun and entertainment, the company’s ethos is that a country's culture, history, myths and legends best comes to life when brought to you by a local and that you can still get great service and have an incredible time travelling on a budget.

Haggis has built its reputation through word of mouth recommendation and having started with just one trip it now runs range of award-winning adventures from 1 to 10 days throughout Scotland, England and Wales. The organisation places a strong focus on service excellence through customer feedback and engagement, and it has won several awards, the most recent being National Winner of Visit Scotland Thistle Awards Best Tour Operator Programme of the Year 2013.

Pete’s Story

In this case study, Pete Duncan talks about his experience of being part of the first Edinburgh Napier Destination Leaders Programme and how this experience has led to him making strategic leadership contributions to the development of his organisation, Haggis Adventures, as well as the impact the course has had on his own personal and professional development.

Reasons for participating in the Destination Leaders Programme

I was at a point in my career where I had got comfortable in my day to day role – if it was to develop I felt it required me to have a wider understanding of the tourism industry and its challenges across the destination. I also felt I needed to widen my professional network. I wanted to have a deeper understanding of what affected the tourism industry on a more strategic level and I was looking for an opportunity to meet and mix with people within tourism but not necessarily working in the same sector as me. I was particularly keen to hear about the pressures of working in the public sector and the challenges faced by those in hospitality. I was looking to push myself to engage with people whom I wouldn't normally meet and to learn from this experience.

Programme Expectations Prior to Starting the Course

I think I expected it to be more intimidating and I expected to feel out of my depth. I assumed that the others on the programme would know more than me. In retrospect this was probably a confidence issue and to do with the fact that we can often tend to get a little isolated working away in our own sectors, whether tour operators, hospitality or visitor attractions for example.

Course Impact: Personal and Professional

In terms of the actual programme, the first weekend was excellent and very well delivered. It was our first residential weekend and we did a lot of group work and got to know each other. The initial weekend also allowed all participants in the room to benchmark themselves with their industry peers and I think it turned out that we weren't that different after all, we were all there fundamentally for the same reasons. I also think that the DLP programme was very different from other business courses I've experienced – overall this course focused on a different way of learning and it asked different questions of the participants which allowed us to work through issues and challenges relevant to our sector or jobs both via an individual and group dynamic but in a practical, hands-on way.

On a personal and professional level my confidence has increased and I appreciate the true meaning of 'networking' and what it can achieve. The strong network which we have built via the programme is an extremely positive thing and I can now pick up the phone and consult with all kinds of new contacts, and similarly I can be there for them. I also believe that my organisation, Haggis Adventures, has benefited from my increased confidence, and the strategic ways in which I can apply leadership learning from the course to my role and my team.

Course Impact: Organisation/Destination – Learning Outcomes

One specific example of how Pete has applied his leadership learning from the DLP to his own organisation, Haggis Adventures, has been:

Collaborative Learning Exchange – Customer Service Development & Team Building

Together with fellow DLP participant David Wilson, at the time, Chief Operating Officer of Edinburgh Airport, Pete set up a collaborative team visit for Haggis staff to visit the Customer Service team at Edinburgh Airport. This allowed both organisations' customer service teams to share their experience, skills and knowledge in operations, customer service and more for mutual benefit.

Pete says, "While on the second DLP residential weekend in St. Andrews, over a drink and a chat with David Wilson, COO of Edinburgh Airport, I learned more about David's job and the customer service team he worked with. In the course of the conversation, it became clear to both of us that David, before he had started the DLP programme, had never considered his job as having anything to do with 'tourism'. I was struck by how significant this was and the shift in perspective that David as well as many others were clearly experiencing through our participation on the DLP programme. If not from a tourism-focused perspective, I wondered whether, under David's leadership, Edinburgh Airport approached its customer service differently. Were there any differences in the focus on customer service that our respective organisations could learn from each other?"

Pete continues, "This prompted me to ask David more about what the Edinburgh Airport customer service team was doing in terms of dealing with transportation of passengers. It turned out that the principles shared between David's organisation and my own, the tour operator Haggis Adventures, were similar. Both involved looking after customers on the move from a transport perspective: getting customers smoothly and safely from one point to the other whilst ensuring the best possible experience. This led to the realisation that perhaps Edinburgh Airport's customer service programme could be better communicated to others in the industry who may find it very beneficial to learn from. Edinburgh Airport had given tours to Blue Badge Guides in the past to demonstrate how the airport deals with incoming customers, but this was the extent of showing those in the tourism sector how the airport approached customer service".

Course Impact: Organisation/Destination – Learning Outcomes - continued

Pete and David decided that further collaboration on this area could be beneficial, and after prompt communications with Rachel Bell of the Edinburgh Airport Customer Service team, they set up a day's visit for 18th November 2014 to allow the Haggis Adventures team to visit Edinburgh Airport.

The team consisted of twenty people: five of the management team and fifteen road crew (tour guides) from both Haggis Adventures and sister company, Highland Explorer Tours. The team were curious about several aspects of visiting Edinburgh Airport including what kind of team Edinburgh Airport Customer Service would be, their approach to challenges, how the Edinburgh Airport customer service team dealt with VIP customers and groups, the Airport team's product and service knowledge, and their teamwork dynamic.

Pete says: "The trip out to the airport went very well. We met at 9.30am and had a brief introduction from Rachel Bell, the Customer Service Manager at the airport. We went through security checks and were issued with airside passes and then taken on a tour of the airfield by Scott, the Operations Manager. We were then given a fantastic insight into the complexity and pressures of running an operation as large as an airport. We spent an hour on the airfield and it was clear that Scott had passion for his role and our team loved the detail he was able to give.

We then returned to the airport conference room where Rachel, Kay and Hazel, members of Edinburgh Airport Customer Service Team shared some of their stories from life behind the scenes at an airport for an hour or so. The stories were all pitched at exactly the right level for our crew and they ended up sharing 'war stories' about life in Operations. It was clear from our visit that the team at the airport has passion for their job and they are very good at what they do".

The learning experience clearly had a positive impact on the Haggis team.

Tour-guide Scott said: "I found the tour of the airport really interesting, particularly from an operations point of view. The logistics involved in servicing even one aircraft are staggering, but to hear about the sheer volume of traffic that passes through the airport every day really puts operating our small coach fleet into perspective! The one thing that stood out for me was the staff that we met from operations and customer service. They clearly show a great passion for the jobs they do, and ultimately that is reflected in the success of the airport. Thanks for a great visit!"

Conclusion

Pete says, “Strategically, the Edinburgh Airport collaboration allowed the Haggis team to get a wider perspective on how other organisations deal with similar operational challenges and managing customer service on a daily basis. Feedback after the visit from our staff was hugely positive, everyone enjoyed the experience, and it’s something I would like to repeat with a visit to another organisation.

I hope our team took from it that no matter what your role is in working with visitors, the pressures can be similar and that it is important to remain professional and to ensure the best possible service at all points of the customer journey”.

Further Information/Links

Haggis Adventures: www.haggisadventures.com

Scottish Enterprise: www.scottish-enterprise.com

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

