



## **Groups & Travel Trade Meeting Notes**

**Thursday 28 September 2023, 2pm**

### **Attendees:**

Florence Wallace, Fiona Errington – VisitWiltshire; David Lane – BGAM – Holiday Inn Salisbury-Stonehenge (Chair); Nick Parry & David Smith – Holiday Inn Salisbury Stonehenge / The Stones Hotel; Sharon Thomas – Corsham; James Sullivan-Tailyour - The Old Bell Hotel, Warminster; Marie Thomas - Salisbury Cathedral; Anna Walton – Longleat; Anna-Karin Hanson – English Heritage; Aimee Edwards – Cholderton Rare Breeds Farm/Bluestone Vineyard; Anna Temple - Milford Hall Hotel (Brightstar Hospitality)

### **Meeting Notes:**

#### **1. Welcome and introductions**

A brief welcome was given by David Lane.

#### **2. How's business? eg. top line trade visitor figures, forward bookings etc.**

Large attractions reporting good summer visitor figures although weather affected numbers on many days. Good demand for forward bookings, particularly for September. There is a general consensus that post COVID there are shorter lead times with people booking much later, perhaps watching weather forecasts etc, before confirming. Some attractions reported that coaches have been full and many have added additional mini-buses when numbers exceed max coach numbers. Others have said the numbers of coaches this summer have been slightly down and when the trade/coach companies have been asked, they've highlighted the difficulties in securing coach drivers.

Salisbury Cathedral has reported a 4% increase when compared to 2019 figures, but this may be due to the change from donation only to charging for groups.

A good number of international trade business is being reported such as visitors from USA, Germany, Italy and East European countries.

Accommodation providers are reporting more leisure business coming in at the beginning of September – more than anticipated. Both accommodation and attractions have noticed a lengthening of the main summer season.

Towns have been busy with coach travel, particularly last-minute enquiries. Events and trails are really important to drive interest in towns and 2-hours free car parking is a big incentive for visitors.

Lots of interest from the towns and business to target coach companies to drive 'stop off for lunch/tea' business throughout the year.

#### **3. VisitWiltshire and Great West Way Travel Trade Updates**

Please take a look at the latest [Travel Trade Activity update June – September 2023](#). Some points to highlight include:

**Destination Britain North America**, San Fransisco 7-11 September. This VisitBritain event was attended by 60 in-market North American buyers and trade press. Great West Way had 44 meetings (39 buyers and 5

press) and there were also numerous networking opportunities (including UK based trade buyers). Great West Way represented travel trade partners at this event with additional bespoke support from Longleat, The Manor House (Exclusive Collection) and Norman Allen Group Travel. Canadians were very interested in the destination – more than previous events. There were many FIT and tailor-made tour operators with fewer running fixed tours. However, by representing a DMC - Norman Allen Group Travel, this enables all businesses being represented the opportunity to be packaged in future itineraries from this market. This is much more of a joined-up approach to this type of event and a new way of working. There will be another VisitBritain DBNA event in 2024.

**ACTION: If you are interested in being represented by Great West Way at VisitBritain's DBNA 2024 – please get in touch with Flo.**

**Great West Way Travel Trade Marketplace** - 15 November is the virtual one-to-one meetings with buyers and 17 November – networking day at Longleat. **Secure your place by 25 October** as the appointment system opens on 27 October. Great West Way have over 30 buyers confirmed and they want to meet with you. Take a look at all the attendees [here](#). Rates from only £250 Plus VAT and booking fee. This is a major trade opportunity for Wiltshire partners to meet with many of the Great West Way Official Tour Operators.

**ACTION: BOOK NOW AT [www.greatwestway.co.uk/traveltrade/marketplace/suppliers](http://www.greatwestway.co.uk/traveltrade/marketplace/suppliers)**

**Wiltshire Travel Trade Familiarisation Visit** – thanks to everyone on the Wiltshire travel trade group who supported this fam visit - we can't do this activity without everyone's support.

VisitWiltshire recently partnered with [Greatdays Travel Group](#) to offer a 2-night, 2-day 'Wiltshire on the Great West Way®' Familiarisation Visit which took place on 10-12 October 2023. We were joined by 14 domestic group travel organisers, coach and tour operators. The visit included [STEAM Museum of the Great Western Railway](#), [Studley Grange Garden & Leisure Park](#), [REME Museum](#), [Bowood House & Gardens](#), [Bluestone Vineyard](#), [Longleat House](#), [Bridge Tea Rooms](#), [Old Sarum](#), [Salisbury Cathedral](#) with overnight stays in both Swindon and Salisbury. Initial feedback from attendees rated the overall itinerary expectation as 10 out of 10 and group visits expected to return from the end of 2024 and into 2025.

#### 4. Travel Trade Tactical Activity Plan 2024

We are continuing to follow the [Travel Trade Tactical Activity Plan](#). Our immediate priorities and activity includes the following:

**Group Leisure & Travel Show**, Milton Keynes took place on 5 October. VisitWiltshire attended as part of a Great West Way stand, with partners including English Heritage, Longleat, Cheddar Gorge, DoubleTree by Hilton Swindon and The Old Bell Hotel - Warminster. We received a record number of scanned contacts - totalling 143 key trade contacts and the GTO data gave us 47 new contacts to add to our Wiltshire database, which shows the importance of attending these domestic trade shows. Wiltshire was a finalist in the Best UK Destination category at the Group Leisure & Travel Awards.

Forthcoming Opportunities include:

**World Travel Market**, 6 – 8 November, Flo will be attending this year as a visitor, meeting a few buyers and key contacts. Please get in touch with Flo if you plan to attend as a visitor too.

**Excursions**, Wembley Stadium will take place on Sat 27 January. Stand sharers currently confirmed include Bowood, Longleat, DoubleTree by Hilton Swindon and The Old Bell Hotel – Warminster. Stand sharing spaces still available from £735 plus VAT and literature distribution from £130 plus VAT.

**Britain Ireland and Marketplace** 26 January 2024 (in-person event in London) – the VisitWiltshire team can represent your business. Details available on request.

**British Tourism & Travel Show**, NEC, Birmingham will take place on 20-21 March 2024. This is a two-day show. Stand sharing costs will be from £1,115 plus VAT (excluding graphics and accommodation and

assuming a minimum of 4 stand sharers). Costs will be higher if you are planning to exhibit directly with the show organisers.

There are two forthcoming fam visits for Great West Way / Wiltshire in January - Showcase Britain (VisitBritain) are looking to bring a group of buyers from GCC market and Abbey Ireland & UK DMC are looking to bring sales staff and directors.

**ACTION: Please contact [Flo](#) if you are interested in any of these opportunities.**

## **5. Any Other Business**

David Lane reinforced attending trade shows with Wiltshire / Great West Way and suggested everyone interested in trade should be attending Marketplace, as it's a great event – with the right people for you to develop your own trade business. You can see all the attendees who have booked now at <https://www.greatwestway.co.uk/traveltrade/marketplace/attendees>. Book now at <https://www.greatwestway.co.uk/traveltrade/marketplace/suppliers>

**ACTION: Please let Flo / Fiona know if you have anything new to promote to the trade eg. Christmas/new year, New for 2024 information, specialist tours etc.**

Next Great West Way Connections meeting will take place on Tuesday 24 October 2023. This will include a Travel Trade Training - an overview of working with the Travel Trade (in preparation for Marketplace) delivered by a range of Industry experts, including ETOA, VisitBritain and Tour Partner Group. If you haven't already signed up please can you [REGISTER TO ATTEND](#). The system will automatically send you the meeting link to add to your diary.

## **6. Date of Next Meeting**

**Provisionally - Thursday 1 February at 2pm. Registration link and further details to follow.**