



Learn, Taste, Experience – Iceland (LTEI)

23rd – 29th October 2016

Case Study – Hospitality Service



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Introduction

This case study is inspired by the Learn, Taste, Experience visit to Iceland in October 2016. The aim of this case study is to experience a wide a variety of Icelandic hospitality establishments, and discuss how they approach their service offering and their attitude towards hospitality service.

Our methodology was based on the question “How are Icelandic businesses approaching their service offer and attitude?”. We approached it by reviewing our experiences as a group for each visit. Throughout the visits we engaged stakeholders in individual conversation or questioned them to glean personal viewpoints and added information to that presented formally. Each individual in the group then wrote a summary of their key learning which we have brought together in a final summary.

The Blue Lagoon



The spa is located in a lava field in south western Iceland. Established in 1992, the bathing facility now boasts to welcome 85% of all tourists that visit Iceland, and plans are currently underway to open Iceland's first 5-star hotel next to these geothermal waters.

Upon arrival we were welcomed by our tour guide, a young Icelandic man that had been employed at the Blue Lagoon for 2 years. We were shown around the outside of the lagoon area, and were informed of the history and beginnings of the Blue Lagoon. His information session began with describing:

- The volcanic eruption that created the surrounding landscape nearly 800 years ago.
- How the lagoon was formed giving it its famous blue colour and the wonders of geothermal seawater.
- The role played by elves and why it's so important to keep them happy!

Our guide told us stories of how Iceland is filled with mythology and folklore, which the Icelandic people take seriously. They believe that the mischievous elves played havoc with the construction of the restaurant and surrounding areas, and eventually the Prime Minister himself asked permission from the elves to complete the building by inserting a pen drive with blue prints into a gap in the wall of the restaurant. This story telling proved to be a theme that ran through our time in Iceland.

Hospitality within the Blue Lagoon includes the informal Blue Café and the award winning Lava Restaurant, a stunning restaurant built into the volcanic rock and formed with hand cut volcanic rock tiles. Approximately 50% of visitors to the lagoon dine either in the café or the restaurant. During our brief visit we were served 'blue lagoon cocktails', and a selection of small canapé style crostini including cured ham and arctic charr. The restaurant also offers an upper mezzanine level that can be used for private dining functions.

One proactive service that the Blue Lagoon are currently offering is a visit to the lagoon for airline passengers on a 6 hour or more stop over, awaiting a connecting flight. This service includes transfers to and from Keflavik International Airport, a mere 20-minute drive away.

Laugarvatn Hostel



The exterior of the building was clean and had a modern, fresh look. Our welcome to the hostel was unassuming, however at all times there was a staff presence and we were always greeted with a smile. Arriving at night, the owner had our rooms keys available for us to head directly to our rooms and drop off our bags. This efficient service was appreciated after a day of travelling.

Our rooms were clean and basic with homely touches and modest décor. Inside were single beds with a bedside table and a well-equipped bathroom with a large, modern shower. There was also shared kitchen areas for guests to use.

The breakfast buffet consisted of fresh fruit, juices, hot drinks, cereals, cold meats, cheese, eggs and the traditional lava bread served throughout Iceland. All produce was fresh and very neatly presented, plenty of food and the option to top up on food or drink if we wished. From the dining area we were able to view the lake and mountains behind the hostel, an outlook that would surely appeal to guests choosing this hostel when staying in Iceland.

Overall the hostel, although basic and quiet, had charm and feeling of calm. During our stay we were able to use the dining area after breakfast for group work, and at no time did we feel rushed or unwelcome. The owner was hospitable and friendly, topping up the table with fresh tea and coffee throughout.

Lindin Restaurant



The building was hidden and particularly difficult to see at night. The establishment was not well sign posted, and passing potential customers would maybe not realise that it was a restaurant. There was a large Land Rover car outside that was used for promotion, but again we were only able to see this the next day in the light.

We had no real welcome from the staff in the Lindin Restaurant and didn't receive and meet and greet. We were shown through to a dated dining area that had a large table for all of 20 of us to sit at, with a basic table setting. Low lighting gave a cosy, warm atmosphere but could have benefitted with some form of background music.

Once seated we were offered water and given our starter of cured whale, salmon, lava bread and butter. There was not a great deal of interaction from the waiting staff, and there was no explanation of what we would be served or menus on the table. Our guide/host Asborg Arnthorsdottir informed us of what our starter was, and gave some explanation behind history and ill feeling toward eating whale meat in Iceland. The waiting staff were quick and efficient when clearing and then offered the wine list. Our main course was again not described, but was a very nice and flavoursome dish of grilled trout, potato pastry and large cous cous with vegetables.

Overall our customer experience wasn't memorable and we felt that there was little attention to detail. From our own perspective we understand that we were in a different place emotionally after arriving late and after a long day travelling. We did not know others in our group well, and realise from this experience that if we had been welcomed in another way: a warm welcome and pleasant, inviting staff that were more interactive with us as customers that our feelings may have changed. Chef Baldur was not present to talk us through our meal, a point in the evening that we were looking forward to.

Laugarvatn Fontana



The exterior of the building was very interesting and blended into the surroundings and landscape of volcanic rock. We received an inviting and professional welcome from the owner, who then led us down to the waterfront and explained that his family had been baking the traditional lava bread in the volcanic sands next to the water, that could reach 100°C, for many years. He proceeded to dig out a well wrapped pot from the sand, and asked us to follow him back to the restaurant to sample it.

The interior of the building was modern and contemporary, with large ceilings and a polished concrete floor. The large windows gave wonderful views of the lake and mix of natural geothermal and man-made pools. A very colourful and fresh looking buffet was well set out and organised with till points and the end.

A tasting session was then arranged of the delicious bread, served with butter and smoked trout. We were provided with a very knowledgeable and engaging presentation from the owner during this tasting, and we collectively felt that this explanation and knowledge is key in customer service and a highlight of our visit.

Our visit was then completed with a dip in the geothermal baths, which had a serene, calming and relaxing atmosphere. The changing areas were well maintained, and again clean and modern. Attention to detail was recognised in the spa standard high quality shampoo and conditioner, quality towels and scented candles.

Overall we felt that the attention was excellent, and we felt that the greeting and the environment was admirable. Most importantly, we all felt included! Improvements could possibly be made in the training of staff, as there was no direction as to where to put shoes or towels and no directions to the changing area. The importance of the whole customer experience and journey is crucial, not just the introduction and welcome.

Efsti-Dalur Dairy Farm



The exterior looked like a farm and fitted the landscape. Our own personal experience was also enjoyable it was snowing. There was a lot of new development of the barn and restaurant, which had been completed in a sensitive manner to the environment.

Our welcome was warm; we were directed to an area for jackets coats etc. The interior of the building was quirky with a glass panel to view the cows and flowed very well from the barn through to the restaurant. There was particularly good use of attention to detail – a milk urn was used as a hand pull beer font and utensils on the tables for condiments we farm themed.

The whole ambiance was very welcoming. Although we were in a barn, there was a homely feeling. A huge amount of detail and information was given to us by the endearing Gudrun, the farmer's daughter. She began with her family story and again we were emotionally involved in the story, feeling welcomed into the family home. The relationships between the owner/manager and the staff was very professional and realistic, staff training was led by example and natural. Humour was also used for us to enjoy the whole experience; we would only be allowed ice cream if we finished our whey protein.

We got to taste the product described by the owner, a delicious meat soup with bread and a pesto butter, followed by ice cream served in waffles made in house, the ice cream coming from the milk of the dairy cows on the farm.

This was a novel experience. We felt valued and important to the business, and looked after throughout. The staff and owner were naturally very hospitable, explaining their culture and people. A complete farm to fork, memorable experience.

Gulfoss Waterfall



This establishment felt a little like a mass tourist attraction with a service station style appearance. There was a huge amount of people wandering and the car park was extremely busy. Inside was a large shopping area with gifts and Icelandic produce, and a display of colourful cakes on the right to advertise the open plan hall that could cater for 600 plus customers. We were led through to a canteen style area that was modern and had an excellent view from the large windows. We had obviously just come in after a busy service as the staff were busy clearing dirty crockery and cutlery from the tables.

We were greeted by a kind gentleman who was very keen to share his experience of development of the business. We were given the impression that the place had grown out of all proportion beyond their expectations, which was originally from a tent. Staff numbers felt low compared to the size of the establishment, with a maximum of 35. Explanations were given reasonably well and to the best of his ability with language, offering interesting facts including Gulfoss means 'golden falls'.

The dining area had a commercial feel but done to a high standard. The functional selection of tables could be easily cleaned and able to cater for large parties, but gave little in the way of ambiance. We had little opportunity to sample hospitality, having only mass produced coffee served in paper cups with no spoons or sugar. Traditional meat soup made with lamb and other local ingredients was available on the menu. Freshly made cakes were on offer every day, and also paninis. The gentleman explained that they were looking to introduce pizza and other foods that are easy and quick to prepare due to the large number of covers, as up to 600 litres of meat soup was being prepared every day.

The speaker had knowledge of his staff and product. Staff presentation and uniform appeared a bit messy and in need of renewal. The staff were from several countries and given accommodation on site, and it was explained that this accommodation was in expansion. Staff had their own specific responsibilities and were busy on task whilst we listened to the presentation.

More attention to detail could have been given here, our impression was that the staff were struggling with the sharp increase in visitor numbers and also to keep staff for the whole year.

Hotel Geysir



The exterior of the building was plain with wooden boards, unassuming but clean and presentable. We were met at the door by smartly presented chef who made us feel expected and welcome, giving us the impression that he wanted us to have a positive experience. The staff inside were slightly more reserved and taken aback.

The interior was completely breath taking, we entered a beautifully ambient room with an open fire, high ceilings, low lighting, warmth, lit candles, smart tables and great touches of interior décor.

The atmosphere was delightfully ambient, with atmospheric music, mood lighting and well-polished cutlery, glasses and clean linen. We felt at home and were allowed to move around with shoes off and settled around in groups.

Staff added to the relaxation of our experience. The Head Chef gave us a small presentation and answered any questions that we had, demonstrating his passion for his work. He also came out of the kitchen for each course of our meal to explain the product. The waiting staff were attentive, knew whenever anyone needed something, were polite and easy to talk to. Our waiter showed an incredible knowledge of product and ingredients, informing us that each member of waiting staff was able to taste items on the menu to enable them to explain the dishes to customers with ease.

We dined on high quality cuisine, prepared using an innovative selection of food. The use of spice and herbs to add new tastes were given for us to sample. Two different deserts were presented for us to try and there were no issues with sharing.

We were all extremely impressed with the knowledge of the staff, and it was apparent that this was a team effort between back and front of house, and a great relationship with chefs and waiters allowed for an exceptional customer experience.

Frioheimar Greenhouse



On arrival the light from the greenhouse was impressive. The exterior could have been more polished, with unstructured car parking and a muddy ground. The general housekeeping of the front of house area could have been better, however it reminded us that we were entering not only a restaurant but a food production establishment.

We received an excellent welcome from the owner and the chef, it was noted that it was not only us that received this welcome but all customers. The owner made each and every customer feel important and valued, and he maintained this individuality during our visit speaking with each and every table.

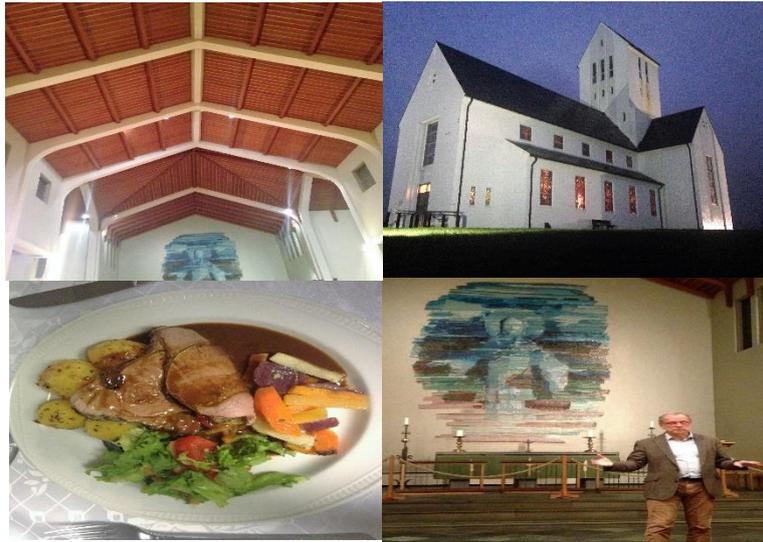
The smell of the fresh tomatoes was wonderful. The shop area at the front was well laid out, with a variety of tomato based products, including chutney and sauces well displayed. The packaging of the products for sale were excellent, telling the family story through pictures. We had a feeling of entering an establishment that was really cared about and loved. The vines and tomato plants added the feeling of outside-inside. It was explained that all herbs and salad were all grown on site with the tomatoes, which added to the feeling of being able to see what was being eaten.

The owner went around every table to explain the story and history of the company. In addition, all staff were explaining the story to customers, with lots of attention to detail and interaction. There was excellent use of family pictures, and there was a sense of theatre to the service. The business has grown from serving 900 to 130,000 customers per year in the short space of four years.

The owner and chef gave a presentation, and we sampled tomato cocktails and small crostini with tomato chutney. He explained that all training of staff takes place in house and through shadowing the owner. He has a very clear vision on where the company is heading and what it wants to be.

Commitment to the use and concept of only using tomatoes was commendable and obviously works to entice customers and visitors. They had a complete belief in what they were doing, a simple concept, delivered well. Only three items on the menu for main course, all extremely high quality and items made to a high standard – less was definitely more

Skalholt Church



The exterior of the church itself was breath taking, seemingly sitting itself on a hill and being well lit from below added to the drama of an impressive building.

We enjoyed a fantastic welcome, met by a knowledgeable guide whom we later found out was the minister. He was quite eccentric but this added to the experience, and proved to be very important to us during our visit. We were led in to the church through an underground tunnel which again added to the drama. There was a brief explanation of the history outside the church and of the surrounding area, once inside our guide gave a wonderful presentation and history lesson.

The interior of the church was astounding, well maintained and a large mosaic of Christ displayed on the back wall. We were led to another building with a small restaurant, a functional space dining and meeting, also used as a retreat. There were vines growing within the building hanging from a glasshouse space, with simple furniture. We listened to stories of including the Christian ethic, prayers and we felt that we were receiving genuine hospitality.

We enjoyed relaxed dining, food choice was simple roast lamb with rhubarb jelly, roast potatoes and mixed vegetables which was delicious. The chef then served cheesecake in a separate lounge for relaxing and having coffee which was very comfortable. The cheesecake was accompanied by a story that made it extra special.

Our host was crucial to our journey and experience through the church, he was knowledgeable and very intelligent. The explanation of the history of the church was interesting and also made humorous by the minister. The chef was at hand to serve and explained his cheesecake which was given in abundance.

The ambience and relaxing, calming atmosphere was well received, however there is a worry that maintaining this unique selling point and identity might be lost as the visitor numbers continue to grow.

Hotel Fludir



We were welcomed to the hotel with our keys being organised for us arriving at the reception area, but we did not receive much interaction from the staff. The interior was clean, sharp and functional with wonderful displays of art on the walls and sculptures around the reception area. Our rooms were well presented, with large comfortable beds and modern bathrooms with showers.

One particular area of interest and a huge selling point for guests was the option to use the natural geothermal hot tubs located in the outside the centre of the hotel. However, rooms not overlooking this area did not have easy access the hot tubs and some keys didn't work for the back doors to access it.

It was felt among our team that there was nothing special about the atmosphere of the building, a functional space that would have benefitted with some background music. The owner was fantastic, and spoke to us for some time, answering questions and making us feel extremely welcome. Other staff didn't interact with us as customers, the younger staff were more helpful and attentive, willing to make conversation.

We received excellent food in hotel. The small touches made it different to other hotels. The superb breakfast buffet included a waffle machine and flower essence therapy to have in a glass water, something some of us had never experienced before. All food items were expertly displayed, and included a selection of hot, cold and traditional elements.

Bryggjan Brugghus



The exterior of the building was large and impressive, set within a newly developed area of historical interest. Photos on the outside gave a good impression of what to expect and an A frame board was used to advertise.

Entering the building was a most impressive experience despite it being dark, and gave the impression that we could be going anywhere and we could explore. Large windows to the rear gave incredible views onto the port and the maritime museum exhibits. In another area glass separated the Brewing Vats where we could watch the brewer at work. The amazing graphics and interior design brought a mechanical setting together in an inspirational way. The themed feeling brought in the history of the brewery.

The owner presented to us in a very knowledgeable way, talking about the beers, process and aims. He was honest about successes and things that did not work, how they had altered the visits to the brewery to make it more workable. His aim was clear to bring beer back into fashion after a long term prohibition. His presentation was natural and he presented in a casual yet professional manner. However, a lot of noise from the kitchen meant it was difficult to hear him at times.

Cool was the word that many of us used to describe the atmosphere of this relaxed place. It had an urban vibe, staff had a casual look, beards and jeans was present. The owner emphasised that this wasn't a high service experience and that he wanted people to relax and wait for their food. Having said this there was a speed course available daily. Music was suitable to create a fun attitude and the business invested in creating the right ambiance for different times. Clear themes to the selection of artefacts/furniture keeping the history of fishing and maritime and create a hip style.

The staff were not clear on selling the tasting experience of the beers and some of the group did not get the three beers as they would have liked. The bar service was casual and informal however was quick and friendly. There were not many staff on shift and the kitchen often had to ring the bell a few times to get the food out.

Our food was nicely presented, good choice of fast food for the establishment however the chips were cold. The beer experience was great however undersold. The three separate beers were great and delivered with a quick summary of the type of beer.

Restaurant Slippbarinn



The exterior of the hotel and restaurant was unimpressive, and in the dark it was difficult to make out where the entrance was. We found a hand written sign attached to a door, directing us around the back of the building to the actual entrance. Once inside we were greeted and seated into a lounge area quickly. Spaces were provided to place our wet coats and a waiter was available to direct and support us.

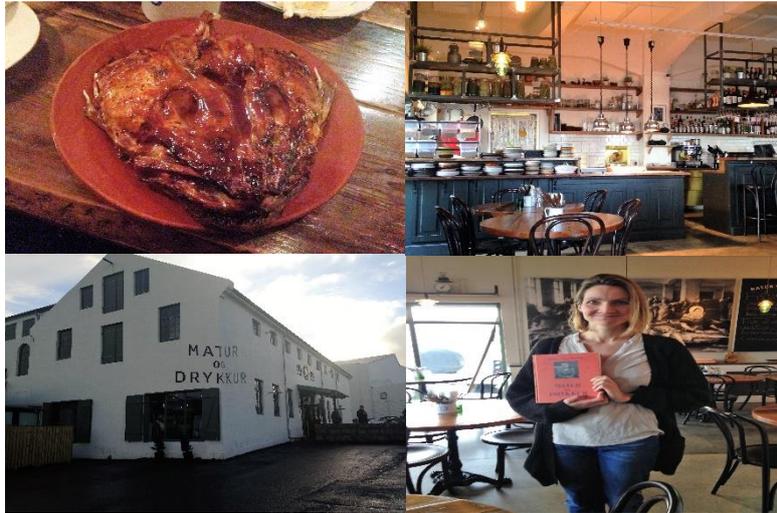
The exterior did not compliment the interior, which was open plan with a connecting bar, hotel reception and individual rooms for private group space. Quirky and humorous design was used around the rooms, including authentic looking antique furniture. Groovy sections of music related to the design, "restrooms and all that jazz". The fabulous central bar and general design initiative was impressive.

The whole interior was very designed and our designated room had a lovely unique 50's design, however the music did not reflect the level of quality. The entire building was buzzing and it was nice to feel like part of large body of people enjoying themselves and yet still having the privacy of a private room. The room was nicely shut off by sliding glass.

We had a dedicated waiter for the whole evening who was efficient and quick. He took away empty glasses and dishes promptly and constantly refilled the water jars. He was attentive however did not attempt to communicate other than asking for drinks order. He handled a spillage of milk well and was quick to remedy the situation with a free glass of wine. He was considerate about being quiet whilst speeches were going on and quick to take payment and order taxis for us on departure. We received high quality service from one person, the use of and a large trolley to bring food to the room made this a simpler task.

We were served tapas which was beautifully presented with lovely selection of tastes. The food was good quality and had been given thought, enabling staff to quickly produce for large numbers.

Matur og Drykkur Restaurant



The exterior was well thought out, with the name of the restaurant painted around the corner and the name of the museum on the front, successfully advertising both establishments contained in the one building. The inside was clean and spacious, a reception to the front giving entrance to the museum, a well displayed shop and the restaurant to the left.

On arrival we were met by the owner, who explained the ethos of the restaurant and the food. The building was once a warehouse for hanging locally caught fish, and this was indicated through old photos of the warehouse on the walls. The aim and inspiration is to take traditional recipes from one particular Icelandic cook book and recreate them using innovative ideas and local, fresh ingredients.

We were made to feel welcome, so much so that the owner made space for us to dine when they were already fully booked. Our experience and customer care was exceptional. The staff were extremely well informed, and spoke us through not only all of the dishes we ate, but how best to eat them. A wine flight was also available for each course, and these were also fully explained; how it would complement the food and which vineyard the grapes came from.

One waiter was so helpful he agreed to us interviewing him, as we were interested in how he had come to being so well trained in a country that prefers to train staff in house, with no real form of educational qualifications in front of house service.

Q. What training have you undergone in front of house service and customer care?

I am currently undergoing 86 weeks vocational training within the workplace, which is 3 semesters (equates to three years of training). Another member of staff is my assessor, which makes it easy to work and train at the same time. I receive below minimum wage, but this is a great filter to attain dedicated staff. The cost of living is huge in Reykjavik. My training includes learning different styles of service, Russian, French and English. Last year 15 students graduated from this programme, however there were 10 new hospitality establishments opened in Reykjavik, guaranteeing each student employment.

Hospitality Service in Iceland

As part of our research we interviewed Asborg Arnthorsdottir, our tour guide/host for the week, in a bid to gain an insight into what feelings Icelanders have towards hospitality service as a career opportunity for younger people. It is clear that the growing influx of tourists and visitors to hospitality establishments may change the views on in house training, as time may not be as available to train staff.

Q. Is formal hospitality training important to Icelandic establishments?

Iceland are a little behind the British with regards to the formal hospitality training. I wonder if we keep up with this number of visitors. Hospitality is regarded as more of a job when studying rather than a career choice for younger people in Iceland, however some people fall in love with the industry and decide to stay in it and form a career out of it. Large chains have training systems in place for their employees, whereas smaller businesses train from the heart, and employees learn by doing. Some family businesses do not see education in the sector as important, because each business has grown organically responding to what the visitor needs. Each small business and farm work in partnership to support one another, particularly being based in a rural area. They have confidence in their product so do not feel the need to compete with one another, however, I do worry that maintaining these unique selling points and identities might be lost as the visitor numbers continue to grow.

The tomato growers at Frioheimar did go through education first, and then opened their business of passion. They do not see themselves as a restaurant – they are selling an experience and the food is part of their identity

Do you feel that overall the level of service has improved since the tourism boom?

Iceland have not yet reached an extremely high level of hospitality service; we are getting there little by little. There are still no 5 star hotels in Iceland, and we are finding that it is not just bus tours that are arriving in Iceland but middle aged tourists with lots of money to spend, expecting a high level of service. This is something that we need to capitalise on and deal with as we move forward and progress and grow tourism.

Quote from Promote Iceland's Inga Hlin Palsdottir

“There needs to be a shift in mentality of Icelanders towards hospitality and tourism as a career. Education is the key. It is not seen as a career used to be seen a hobby unless you own the business. It was not a career choice 10 years ago, now it touches everything and we have no choice.”

General Summary of key points:

- ✓ The host/chef is important to an establishment.
- ✓ One high quality member of staff doesn't always make the whole experience; one negative can impair the impression.
- ✓ The environment/décor is a vital first impression, although subjective regarding interior design etc.
- ✓ Family involvement and return directs the whole experience - hospitality is welcoming on a personal level and emotive in family run businesses.
- ✓ Speed of service and going the extra mile to ensure customers are satisfied e.g. extra soup, bread etc. makes for a welcoming and inviting experience.
- ✓ Welcome and interaction from staff should be the same even when the manager/owner is not present.
- ✓ Folklore, storytelling adds to the experience.
- ✓ Decide on what you are doing and do it well. A concept which is simple and clear works well.

Group Conclusion

The Icelandic hospitality style is very relaxed. They are outward looking, employing many from overseas. Training appears to mostly in house, with no real formal hospitality training or qualifications. Overall the Icelandic people have a belief and passion in their products and have a clear vision of where they want their service and product to be. This appears to be so successful because customers can connect with the stories and journeys explained by the owners, using emotion in their service style. There are no challenges, only opportunities!

During our time in Iceland we undertook some research into the Vakinn quality rating, Iceland's tourism official quality assurance system. This system is based on a similar one used in New Zealand to grade hospitality and tourism areas. It appeared that this is still in its infancy in Iceland, and only being used in the capital Reykjavik so far, not all establishments are applying it to their businesses as of yet, relying mainly on Trip Advisor reviews and certificates to display. More information regarding the Vakinn Quality rating system can be found at <http://traveltrade.visiticeland.com/safe-responsible-travel/vakinn-quality>



Group biographies and individual learnings



Ainslay Miller

Ainslay began her culinary career by training in a four-star hotel in Ayrshire, gaining most of her culinary qualifications on a vocational basis. Over the space of 15 years she was employed in variety of restaurants and hotels throughout Ayrshire and also in Glasgow, working mainly in kitchens and later having a focus on front of house service. This enabled her to compete in culinary competitions, of which twice she won the regional heats for Scotland.

Ainslay has been employed at Ayrshire College as a lecturer in Hospitality and Professional Cookery for 2 years. She leads learning for students in a variety of kitchen and front of house roles, through practical and theoretical lessons. This has included the development and training of students in the particular skills of food preparation, front of house service, customer care, health and safety, food hygiene and the use of barista coffee machines.

What I have learned:

- The story and journey of each establishment can engage the customer, making them feel involved, and can encourage an enhanced dining experience.
- Communication from the owners, management and chefs between themselves and other establishments is encouraged. Best practice, recipes and methods are shared openly, and great pride is taken when someone has implemented any of these in another area.
- Keeping the product simple and having complete belief in your product is key. For example, by keeping menus small they are able to completely focus on these dishes, and maintain the high standard of preparation and flavours incorporated.
- Setting clear, achievable goals and involving family or staff members in these goals gives one clear vision for the entire team. Everyone knows which direction the business is heading in, and can feel involved and part of the journey.
- Sustainability is not an afterthought and is considered when building the business. Local producers and farmers are used whenever possible, and businesses support one another. I often heard that Icelanders “use what they have”. This all adds to the ‘story’ when describing dishes to customers.

What I will Implement:

- By giving my students the information and history behind the Johnny Walker whisky factory, where our new Kilmarnock restaurant The Salt and Barrel is situated. I hope that this will encourage the students to tell the customers about the history of the area, giving customers more of a dining experience rather than only a meal.

- I will encourage students to look inward rather than abroad when developing menus. I have already organised more visits to local Ayrshire producers to influence students. I will share dishes, recipes and explain the cooking methods that I learned about on this trip. I will also share photos of dishes that I tried, and explain what I thought worked well.
- I will impart my newly gained knowledge to my peers through presentations, to hopefully inspire and motivate, give new ideas and share all best practice that I witnessed on my trip.
- I intend to be more involved myself with local hospitality businesses, producers and farmers. By keeping myself informed of up to date and current goings on in the Ayrshire hospitality circuit, I will be in a better position to then inform my students.
- I will include more information regarding the importance of sustainability and diversity in my lessons, in a bid to help students understand the impact that it can have.



Lyndsey Phillips

Lyndsey has been the Business Owner of Stimuli Evolve for the last 7 years, which she started in 2009. The company specialises in bespoke training courses in Customer Experience.

They also offer ILM Accredited courses through a partner company and their offering also specialises in the Ayrshire and Arran Food, Drink and Tourism Sector, working closely with clients to build goals and drive excellence. Lyndsey recently delivered a bespoke training course for the retailers of Kilmarnock, focusing on building a strong town positive customer experience.

Lyndsey is a qualified food and dairy technologist, trained chef and previously ran her own deli and now also runs her second company: Ayrshire Hampers. She started her working life with Northern Dairies and then Ashby Dairy Company. She went on to run her own Guest House and Restaurant in the Yorkshire Dales then became a Catering Manager for Tourism Destination Venues. She moved into Sales for Smith Kline Beecham – selling Lucozade and Ribena across the UK to Leisure and Entertainment Accounts including Alton Towers and Blackpool Pleasure Beach to name a couple! After running a successful, award winning Deli for four years, she started her own company Stimuli to deliver training in Customer Service Excellence.

What I have learned:

- A single, focused concept delivered well can be the most powerful message for your business
- Iceland took the time to find out who they are – involved the people – communication was key. Using real life stories brought the Marketing Campaign to life
- The personal element matters – the businesses we visited had a family history that was shared with all customers and visitors – tapping in into the emotion. Everyone had a sense of ownership and connection to the business and felt drawn in to be part of the family. We felt we were visiting their homes.
- Use of Humour – in our crazy, stressed world we forget to have fun. The Promote Iceland Campaign and the Iceland Academy has captured the natural humour of the Icelanders
- Clear Goals, achievable and attainable. Annual reviews to check on results and new goals set.
- Iceland had a low Marketing budget so they had to be innovative – low cost campaigns with maximum impact
- It's all about the people
- New Innovative ideas are discussed and then they do them. No procrastination.
- Self - Funded Projects – not waiting for Government Funding or support. Although the Tourist Board is very active promoting the businesses and the Country
- Tourism budget comes from the businesses and matched by the Government. The businesses buy in to the Marketing that then supports them.
- Key to the future is knowledge on Iceland – its heritage/its past/ its future

What I will Implement:

Ayrshire Hampers

- Use the family story of how the business began
- New Strapline employed – Ayrshire Hampers – Filled With Love
- Develop the #Authentic Ayrshire between both of my companies
- Ayrshire Welcome Hamper Created for use in Holiday homes, hotels, and Caravan Sites
- Develop an Ayrshire Hamper Tour – with the stories of the producers/sellers/visitor centres introduced. Would be good to use for new flights into Prestwick and Tour goes from there – show casing #Authentic Ayrshire

Stimuli Evolve

- Develop the #Authentic Ayrshire

- Re-write my Ayrshire Food Drink Customer Service Course to deliver a course specifically on Ayrshire Past, Present and Future. Who we are? Why we do what we do? What we have to offer and where we are going? Drove passion in our county and in our offering. Involve the People
- Further develop my Local Town Customer Service Standard Course to cover other towns in Ayrshire other than Kilmarnock.
- Create a Certificate on Ayrshire to go with the course/ Use of You tube videos for the course – Ayrshire Academy
- Work with local Food, Drink and Tourist sites to raise the positive profile of Ayrshire by use of the Hashtag – Authentic Ayrshire – and the use of our local humour – be Glocal. Global and local all at the same time.
- Be simple, yet fabulous in all our offerings.



Jane Howe

In the summer of 2010 I purchased and rebuilt a derelict pub on the Isle of Arran that had been closed for some time. I bought back to life The Pierhead Tavern (The PHT as it is fondly known by the locals) in Lamlash and am now shortly coming up to my first anniversary in business. The PHT's specialities are live music, home cooked quality food at reasonable prices and our real ales and huge selection of whisky.

My views of our trip: - Icelandic business owners have been quite inspirational to me. The pride in which they portray their story is intriguing, drawing the listener into the family setting, ethos and pride. The story often detailed about the family gives an emotive bond which adds to the experience in such a positive way. Other stories have incorporated fairy tales which were charming and historical – both added to the engagement with the business. The establishments that were most successful were those that had a high input from family members, suggesting that this provide an added level of commitment and of quality. Having said that, the staff working with family members had clearly bought into the ethos and levels of service quality suggesting good relationships and effective training.

I am taking back to The PHT that family story is key... Customers are interested and engaged with the how and why and although our blog of development was appreciated and read by many, it stopped once we opened and therefore I hope to make a story board for the pub and involve the history of the building and people. Secondly, staff training doesn't need to be a formal program but led by

example based on strong friendly relationships. Thirdly, use and development of Twitter and Instagram will be a big focus for development along with networking with other local businesses.



Nan Li

General Manager at Blairquhan Castle in South Ayrshire, a 5-star exclusive use venue. Nan has 10 years' experience in the hotel industry, specialising in sales and marketing for luxury hotels and venues. Joined Blairquhan in July 2014 as the General Manager, Nan has been enjoying her new role since, and is determined to lead Blairquhan to the next level which is to become one of the best exclusive venues in Ayrshire and Scotland.

Nan's learnings of the Iceland trip:

Iceland people has a very positive attitude towards life. They are naturally very hospitable people, it is very inspirational to see that and learn from their attitude.

Quite a few of the places we went to they have very simple menus. They do simple things but do them really well which makes it very attractive to visitors, as you can see the passion in them doing the things they thrive on. I think this is a very good philosophy to follow, sometimes we tend to over complicate things in the UK. It is best to find the niche of our own business and try to excel in it – this will certainly give Blairquhan the competitive advantage over our competitors.

People in Iceland's hospitality industry seems genuinely enjoy what they do. This shines through everything they do in their daily jobs. It is so true that you can only do things well if you genuinely enjoy doing it – another attitude to take home and educate my staff!

Personal Learning from Iceland Trip- Simon Houison Craufurd

Key points regarding the Hospitality learning in Iceland:

Mainly these are learnings confirmed rather than new learning.

- The offerings are all key on the 'story' of the businesses.
- Staff and owners need to understand what the offering of the business, and USP.
- Focussed business offering drives business, and isn't swayed
- Staff training for all aspects of service seems to in house, but this has been successfully
- Design of exterior and interior very sleek on the whole. Plus, staff uniform and image very well done.



Alisdair Hood

With over 25 years' experience in both kitchen and front of house Alisdair has worked in a variety of businesses ranging from being a catering manager at a Theme park to a chef in a 5-star hotel. His varied career has given Alisdair invaluable knowledge and he ran a successful 80 cover restaurant for 10 years.

Alisdair is now a hands on director of two companies, The Coffee Press a 28 seater coffee shop and Cottage Catering, a developing outdoor catering business.

What I learned from Iceland

- People and culture are everything for a business. This is important from first to last contact with staff. The culture needs to be defined by the owners of the business and if there is a strong culture then that reflects on the service from the staff.
- The business owners all seemed to have a clear vision of where they were going and a clear time frame for when any expansion was to happen.
- There was a clear belief in what each business had to offer and I was impressed by their attitude in maintaining that belief when even on some occasions it had an impact on the business performance in the early stages.
- The Icelandic people we met were friendly and hospitable with a good sense of humour which comes across well and reflects in their businesses.
- Staff training mostly seemed to be done in house by the staff shadowing the owners. This resulted in the staff we met having a clear connection with the business and a willingness for it to be successful.
- There seemed to be within each business a focus on quality rather than quantity. Menus seemed to be short so that the freshness of the product could shine and this would also help with their stock control and limit their wastage.

What I will implement

- I will seek to fully develop a culture within my businesses helping us to achieve our goals and involve all staff in giving input into the future development of the business.

- I intend to work more with local businesses to try and drive more footfall in our area which will help us to grow us as one.
- I will have more belief in what we are doing and impart my knowledge on all my staff to help to develop their skills and continual development.
- Remember to have fun whilst at work. We spend the majority of our life working and it should be enjoyable for everyone.



Susan Colquhoun

Until 2010 career within the retail and visitor services industry, choosing employers based on the company ideology, either working in rural communities often through tourism / tourist retailers or helping to promote the local area. Cumulated in the job of Retail Operations Manager for the National Galleries of Scotland which included the management of ticketing for Exhibitions (up to 5000 visitors per day). Biggest accomplishment in this role: successful opening of the 2700 square foot flagship Link shop on the Mound, Edinburgh, on time, to budget. Overall focus in role: managing change and enhancing visitor experience.

In 2010 career switch to NFU Mutual, attraction being that it's in the heart of the rural community, it's insurance business protects local and rural business and close alignment and representation of NFUS meant a large part of the role was helping and supporting Farmers with wider issues such as access, renewables, greening and diversification.

Undertook the Rural Leadership Programme to gain more knowledge and more importantly skills and confidence to progress career, and to develop a network of likeminded individuals and friends throughout Scotland.

Undertaking programme coincided with joining The National Trust for Scotland as Visitor Services Manager at the Robert Burns Birthplace Museum. Responsibility for Catering, Retail and Visitor Experience. Main challenge to drive the Museum forward, improving Visitor Experience, barriers are deeply ingrained attitudes amongst staff and some extremely strong personalities resistant to change, line reports Catering Admissions and Retail Managers are all inexperienced requiring strong support and mentoring.

Hobbies: 3 miniature Wirehaired Dachshunds, horse riding, key member of organisation team for Eglinton Horse Trials: Secretary/ Stable Manager/ Sponsorship/ Programme and general dogsbody.

Known for enthusiasm, optimism, tenacity, a desire to succeed

Extensive experience of selling, merchandising, training and problem solving in customer services

Learning points:

This trip has reinforced my belief that service is important but to be unique staff need to understand and embrace the vision and heart of the business.

Almost all businesses we visited have grown organically and see the increase in tourism as an opportunity not a threat or challenge

Perhaps a result of being an island nation and the harness of the environment, people seem to respect the environment, working with it to create experiences, sustainability is important (and used as a selling point).

The natural hospitality and openness of Icelanders mean they are outward thinking, many having travelled and experienced other cultures, and have a desire to meet, greet and share.

We also need to remember to make time, even when busy Icelanders take time, many of the businesses align their lifestyle and businesses producing what they as a family want.

The greatest thing I am taking away from this is the need to encourage my team to become more confident in the uniqueness of what we offer at the museum and across the general site. We need to celebrate our culture and the part that Burns placed in this as well as his relevance in modern Scotland.

(reinforced by Sylvia at Promote Iceland who feels they have been so successful in connecting with people and increasing tourism because they have been themselves)

Prior to visiting Iceland, I was in the final draft stages of the new Visitor Experience Strategy for the Museum, as a result of this trip I will be revisiting this to ensure we have a clear vision of what we are and what we want to offer, once completed this will drive training and development for staff. I need to find the best way to get staff buy in and encourage individual responsibility for visitor experience.



Simon Houison Craufurd

Simon has worked as Managing Director of Craufurdland Ltd, running small country estate for over 12 years. Tourism offerings (amongst many others) include successful Fly Fishing Lochan, with associated small café, Luxury Self-catering at Craufurdland Castle, plus have operated some small

bespoke 'Crawford Tours' for approx. 30 guests. About to build 60 seat Café/Restaurant in the estate on shore of fishing lochan.

The Estate is family owned and run, Simon works with his wife, who he met when they were both doing MBA at Strathclyde Business School, and also his brother and sister. He also sits on the Ayrshire LAG and is Regional Manager for Scottish Land and Estates, covering South West Scotland.

Simon has previously been on the Scottish Enterprise Rural Leadership Program, which also had a learning journey as part of it which he found exceptionally useful.

Personal Learning from Iceland Trip

Key points regarding the Hospitality learning in Iceland:

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- Focussed business offering drives business, and isn't swayed
- Staff training for all aspects of service seems to in house, but this has been successfully
- Design of exterior and interior very sleek on the whole. Plus, staff uniform and image very well done.
- Don't underestimate the power and benefits of a bit of humour.



Implementation within Craufurdland Estate and particularly new Restaurant Laird's Table.

- Make a clear definition of the 'theme' and 'style' of the business and stick to it.
- Customer expectations at all points on the customer journey need to be considered.
- Staff training is key to getting the atmosphere and style of the venue, and as such design of training is key.
- Play to your strengths, and don't get hung up on what others do. Understanding your competition is important, but more important is doing what you do yourself is far more important.