



Sense of Place: Iceland's Culinary Experience (SPICE)

2 – 8 June 2019

Project Summary

Context & Background

Food and drink are prominent drivers of business and research shows that while not a primary factor in the choice of where to visit, it is high on the list of secondary reasons. Numerous European destinations recognise this and have become skilled at telling the stories of local products and producers to differentiate themselves in a crowded marketplace. Iceland's rich and varied cuisine has an international reputation and its people have a tradition of storytelling which is authentic and engaging. Participants were offered the opportunity to observe first hand, to question and to reflect on different techniques used by fellow hospitality and tourism professionals.

Aim and Objectives

To facilitate knowledge transfer between public, private and voluntary sector practitioners through better understanding of a European dimension of how food and drink is successfully integrated by tourism destinations and hospitality businesses - in this case the region of South Iceland. Specific objectives were:

- *To focus on three topic areas - story-telling, product development verses authenticity and experience development from an SME and destination perspective.
- *To develop three qualitative case studies, drawn from site visits, interviews, workshops and participants own knowledge to demonstrate and evidence best practice in the chosen topics.
- *To produce actionable messages and best practice recommendations to disseminate through tourism and hospitality business networks, individual SMEs, freelance trainers, public-sector policy makers and academic audiences to improve knowledge and skills.

Participant Profile

This project enabled 25 professionals from the food & drink, tourism & hospitality and academic sectors to participate in a seven day study-visit to South Iceland. Participants included owners/operators of SMEs, food producers, chefs, accommodation providers, training providers, college lecturers, business network coordinators and visitor attraction managers. Participants represent SMEs and organisations where it is difficult to facilitate long periods of time outside of the workplace, and who benefit greatly from a focused and intensive learning programme. Many participants were from rural businesses with great incentive to maximise their opportunity for knowledge acquisition, skills development and to expand their network of contacts away from the workplace, without too much disruption or overall loss of productivity.

Activities

The mixed methods study programme covered site visits to SMEs, a seminar with presentations from the host and sending countries, sessions for individual and group learning through qualitative case study working groups and bite-sized workshop sessions. Collectively these activities were designed to share best practice, identify benefits (and drawbacks) and exchange different perspectives in order to improve understanding and experience practical application in the workplace.

The participants learnt about the role of story-telling initiatives to promote food and drink, co-operative marketing and the growing desire for authentic local experiences to increase economic benefits for the participating businesses as well as the wider destination. Discussion with the hosts and within the group challenged the ideas and importance of authenticity, of developing stories and experiences, what it means and how it could apply to their workplaces.

Methodology

Pre-visit preparation, travel, health and safety and financial arrangements were delivered by Tourism Angles, as was post visit evaluation and dissemination activity monitoring. Both the Host and Intermediary partners provided local assistance relating to accommodation, site visits, transportation, speakers and eating arrangements. The programme was developed jointly between Tourism Angles and HfSU.

Results and Impact

Three qualitative case studies were produced during this study visit, which have been disseminated through businesses, networks, by local and regional public sector organisations, through UK networks/colleagues, through the Icelandic partner organisation and networks and wider the EU portal. Presentations have been shared and published on websites and made available to all who wish to use them.

The mix of SME and academic participants enabled growth of subject knowledge to integrate into relevant current curricula and practical application to support new teaching delivery models and future course content. It was also instrumental in supporting a topic for a Masters degree.

This project has contributed to meeting the UK Government Tourism Action Plan (2016) regarding jobs and skills development, by assisting SMEs to compete in a national and international context. Participants continue to put their knowledge, skills and competences into practice and to date the experience has been presented at over 200 occasions and reached over 2,000 people.



Co-funded by the
Erasmus+ Programme
of the European Union

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